THE IMPERIAL FACE OF CHINA AT TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY—AN ANALYSIS OF EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI’S PORTRAITS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the late Qing imperial portraits. Examining representative photographic portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) taken by Yu Xunling (ca.1880s–1943), this thesis explores different concepts associated with portraiture, including representing the ruler’s authority, individual identity and self-fashioning, and the function of the monarch’s image. I discuss how Cixi’s exploited photographs to convey her authority and to establish her identity as a merciful and transcendent ruler by fashioning herself as Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. In addition, I analyze the political function Cixi’s photographic portraits served when they were made into multiple copies and more widely circulated.

In regard to Katharine Carl (1865–1938) and Hubert Vos’s (1855–1935) oil portraits of Cixi, I investigate the particular factors that had an impact on the two foreign portraitists’ portrayals of Cixi, including the interrelationships of the painters and the sitter who was also the patron, Chinese artistic conventions, and contemporary Western artistic tendencies. In particular, I elaborate upon how Cixi created and managed her image for the West through her daily interactions with Carl. I also put more emphasis on Vos’s personalized portrait of Cixi, considering his ethnographic approach and the influence of Westerners’ prevailing attitudes toward Cixi.
Furthermore, I concentrate on one of Cixi’s portraits painted by Carl to scrutinize the different aspects surrounding its public exhibition at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904, the presentation to the United States government, and Westerners’ receptions of this image. I establish the historical and political context and lay out the involved parties’ intentions in displaying Cixi’s portrait at the Fair. I also consider a variety of literary and visual depictions of Cixi found in the Western press at that time to examine how Westerners’ reception and perception of Cixi’s image was shaped and influenced by the contemporary press. By doing so, I argue that this representation of the Chinese imperial face played an important role in the communication between China and the United States, and exemplifies tensions between China and the West at turn of the twentieth century. This research on the public exhibition of Cixi’s portrait in the West contributes to a relatively unexplored topic in scholarship of the Chinese art history.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the scholarship on Chinese portraiture, much research has been concentrated on the imperial portraits produced during the heyday of the Qing Dynasty, a period of the reigns of Kangxi (1662-1722, reigned 1661-1722), Yongzheng (1678-1735, reigned 1723-35), and Qianlong emperors (1711-99, reigned 1736-1795), owing to their superb artistic quality, rich cultural connotations, and relatively unequivocal identification. On the other hand, images of the late Qing rulers, including Xianfeng (1831-1861, reigned 1850-1861), Tongzhi (1856-1875, reigned 1861-1875), and the Guangxu (1871-1908, reigned 1875-1908) emperors have been overlooked as both the quality and quantity of portraits commissioned from the Painting Academy declined with the decay of the Qing Empire. However, the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908), who experienced the reigns of these three late Qing emperors, and ruled the Qing Dynasty as the de facto ruler for a time, commissioned a large number of portraits, in what were considered unconventional media including photography and oil painting. These works are of considerable art historical significance.

The Empress Dowager Cixi, one of the most powerful women in Chinese history, was born of an ordinary Manchu family from the Yehenala clan. Her father Huizheng (1805?-53) was a beadle of the Bordered Blue Banner, the lowest rank of the Eight
In 1851, Cixi was selected to be the Preparative Concubine of the Emperor Xianfeng, and then appointed “Noble Person (guiren),” the fifth-rank concubine. After giving birth to the only male heir to the throne, Cixi was promoted to “Noble Imperial Consort Yi (yi guifei),” and became second only to Empress Ci'an among Xianfeng’s consorts. Upon Xianfeng’s death in 1861, Cixi’s son, the five-year-old Zaichun, ascended the throne and became the Tongzhi emperor. A group constituted of Eight Regent Ministers was appointed to assist the child emperor. As Tongzhi’s birth mother, Cixi was elevated to Empress Dowager and became the co-regent with the Empress Dowager Ci’an who was disinclined to be involved in governmental and political affairs. In November 1861, Cixi mounted the “Xinyou Court Coup,” by means of which she ousted the Eight Regent Ministers who opposed her interference in politics. By this time, Cixi played the role of the de facto ruler of China. In 1875, Tongzhi died without leaving a child to inherit his throne. Cixi chose her nephew, Zaitian, as Guangxu emperor, and continued to wield power.

Throughout her forty-seven-year rule over China, Cixi showed an iron hand in dealing with domestic affairs, such as repressing the rebellions that threatened the Manchu regime and wiping out her political opponents. She returned the throne to Tongzhi and Guangxu emperors for very short periods of time, but in fact she never gave up controlling their activities. In order to satisfy her needs for a luxurious life style, Cixi did not hesitate to put aside the nation’s interests; for instance, she appropriated the Qing military funding to celebrate her sixtieth birthday in 1895.
During Cixi’s reign, Western powers increasingly gained economic benefits from China through trade and wars, and tried to exert influence on Chinese politics, economics, and culture, and a series of events during Cixi’s reign led to increasing tension between Cixi and the West. For example, although Cixi had to partially support the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-1895), as a result of which China would learn from the West more advanced technologies and knowledge that it would eventually use against the West, Cixi was a conservative ruler and she refused to support complete reform and Westernization that would challenge the Chinese social and political fabric.

In the 1890s, after China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the young Guangxu emperor decided to implement a series of reforms covering the political, legal, and educational areas in 1898, which is known as the Hundred Day’s Reform. Worrying about that Guangxu’s power would be strengthened through the Reform and that he would finally break away from her control, Cixi staged a coup in September 1898 to take power of the country again as the regent. She isolated Guangxu in the Ocean Terrace (yingtai), a small palace on an island in Zhongnanhai near by the Forbidden City, and punished the main reformists. The reform thus ended in failure. In the following year Cixi supported the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion, which triggered off the Eight Nation Alliance’s humiliating intrusion in Beijing in 1900. Abandoning the Forbidden City and the capital, Cixi and Guangxu fled to Xi’an. Determined to return to Beijing and maintain the Manchu’s imperial reign over China, Cixi accepted the peace terms known as the Boxer Protocol. Afterwards, Cixi sought to ease the tensions between
China and the West, and had to show a much friendlier attitude toward foreigners.\(^5\)

In order to show that she was more approachable and open to foreigners, Cixi held “tea parties” for the foreign envoys’ wives, one of whom was Sarah Pike Conger (1843- ? ), wife of Edwin Hurd Conger (1843-1907), the Minister of the United States to China from 1898-1905. In 1903, Cixi deferred to Conger’s suggestion of to have the American painter Katharine Augusta Carl (1865-1938) paint oil portraits of her and have one displayed at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis of 1904. Cixi’s such act marked the shift in her attitude toward the West. During the making of these portraits, Cixi was unwilling to give long sittings for the painter, and therefore she conceived the idea of ordering an amateur photographer, Yu Xunling (ca.1880s-1943), to take photographs of her that Carl could use to paint her portraits. Cixi soon became fascinated by the medium of photography, and commissioned numerous photographic portraits during 1903-05. Probably as a continuation of her soft diplomatic strategies, in 1905, Cixi commissioned another foreign portraitist Huber Vos (1855-1935) to paint her portrait.

One of the most controversial figures in Chinese history, Empress Dowager Cixi has been the subject of much scholarship; however, the rich imagery Cixi patronized in media untraditional in Chinese art has not received serious scholarship in Chinese art history. Cixi’s images have been treated simply as a primary resource to understand the history of late Qing court life and material culture, and their art historical significance has been underplayed.\(^6\) But in fact, these late Qing imperial portraits not only raise
many questions about the notion of portraiture, but also provide a particular lens for viewing the artistic, political, and diplomatic encounter between China and the West at turn of the twentieth century, and therefore these images deserve more comprehensive research.

Portraiture is about an individual’s identity. In both East and West, a portrait is intended not only to represent the physical likeness of its sitter, but also to indicate an individual’s character, emotional or psychological state, and social or political status. Portrait can serve various functions—biographical, commemorative, political, and so on. In China, the art of the portrait has a long history, and images that can be classified or defined as portraits emerged as early as the Han Dynasty (206 BCE- 221 CE). Although the Chinese portrait can be used to proclaim an individual’s social status, commemorate the dead or virtuous person, or project the personal identity and character, the formal portrait has had a particularly close association with rituals of ancestor worship. As to the imperial portraits, many art historians have suggested that by the end of the seventeenth century, Chinese rulers’ portraits, so-called “sacred visage (yurong, or shengrong),” were mainly utilized for worship in ceremonies within the imperial household. They were hung and stored at imperial halls and were rarely displayed and circulated to the public, and their visual language conveyed a great sense of formality expressed through a dignified pose and sedate facial expression. From the early eighteenth century, Qing emperors, including Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong realized the importance of exploiting a variety of images to assert their roles as the Son
of Heaven and to legitimize their rule over China. As a result, their portraits were not only used for rituals, but also served various functions, such as documenting and commemorating significant events, establishing the authority of the ruler, and expressing their self-identifications. However, these monarchs’ portraits were still confined to display in the imperial enclosure and were viewed only by emperors themselves and a limited audience. Cixi’s photographic and oil portraits were substantially different from the portraits of earlier Chinese rulers. Cixi’s images were executed in unconventional media and by foreign artists; further, the avenue of their exhibition or dissemination was expanded. In addition, the interactions between the Western portraitists and their royal sitter took place during an important, transitional historical period and this plays a key role in understanding Cixi’s oil portraits.

My thesis will contribute substantially to a relatively unexplored area in Chinese art history by focusing on photographs of Cixi taken by Xunling, and oil portraits painted by Carl and Vos. I shall explore related issues about portraits, including representing the monarch’s authority, the changing function and symbolism of Chinese rulers’ portraits, and how Cixi employed the new medium to convey her identity and selfhood. In regard to the oil portraits of Cixi, this paper will be concerned with the clash of the different artistic traditions of China and the West and the interactions between portraitist and sitter. I will show that these photographs and oil portraits served less memorial or ritual functions than traditional Chinese monarchs’ portraits; instead, they embody more political or diplomatic significance and gave rise to new notions of
the Chinese imperial portrait in a particular political and historical climate.

Objectives and Methodology

The objective of the research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of Cixi’s portraits by surveying different aspects of these images, including their production, exhibition, and reception. I will lay out functions Cixi’s portraits served: they were an attempt to publicize and reassert her absolute authority to a broad social spectrum; to improve her reputation; and to express her friendship to the United States. In discussing the oil portraits painted by Carl, I will demonstrate how Cixi created and managed her image for the West because she might have wanted to improve her reputation through portraits, and will establish the historical and political context for the portrait that was sent to the St. Louis World’s Fair and its public exhibition. This thesis will demonstrate that the late Qing imperial image painted by an American artist in fact played an active role in communication between the West and China, and that it exemplified the subtle relationship and tension between the Western powers and the Qing ruler and complex perceptions of Westerners toward a Chinese ruler at turn of the twentieth century when the Chinese social fabric was radically changing and dramatic conflicts were taking place between China and the West.

This research is cross-cultural, as it deals with a repertoire of images whose subject is a Chinese ruler, and at the same time, the media of these images is Western and modern and some of them were displayed in the West. Thus it is necessary to consider
both the Chinese artistic and cultural tradition and modern portrait theory when discussing these portraits of Cixi. The monographs dedicated to portraiture, including Richard Brilliant’s *Portraiture*, Shearer West’s *Portraiture*, and Joanna Woodall’s *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, which raised a number of concepts and issues about the portrait are the main theoretical resources I rely on. This thesis will largely draw upon firsthand material, including archival records, Katharine Carl’s memoir, Hubert Vos’s interview by the *New York Times* journalist and private letters, reminiscences of observers—Yu Deling (1886-1944) and Yu Rongling (1882-1973) who had served as Cixi’s ladies-in-waiting for a time, the contemporary press and popular cartoons, official publications of the St. Louis World’s Fair, and Sarah Conger’s memoir, to discuss and analyze different aspects surrounding the production, exhibition, dissemination, and reception of Cixi’s images.

In Chapter Two, I discuss three categories of photographic portraits of Cixi taken by Xunling and apply the related concepts about portraiture, including the notion of the ruler’s authority, individual’s identity and self-fashioning, and portrait functions to analyze each one. I examine how Cixi’s photographs explicitly express her authority through the portrait iconography, including the costume, pose, and props, how Cixi tried to establish her identity as a merciful and transcendent ruler by fashioning herself in the role-playing portraits, and the political function that Cixi’s photographic portraits served, especially when making multiple copies of image became practicable. This chapter relies upon Deling Yu’s reminiscences to explore the patron and sitter Cixi’s attempts at
directing her photographic portraits.

In Chapter Three, I explore the particular factors that had an impact on Carl and Vos’s portraits of Cixi, including the inter-relationship of the painters and the sitter who was also the patron, Chinese artistic conventions, and contemporary Western artistic tendencies. In Western portraiture theory, the interaction between artist and sitter is a key feature that makes the portrait distinctive from other artistic genres, because the portrait is often based on a sitting, in which the painter has opportunity to study the sitter’s physical appearance and personality. It is also because most portraits involved a compromise between the artist, the sitter, and sometimes the patron. In *The Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600-1900*, Richard Vinograd also points out that the encounter between artist and sitter with “reverberations and effects” sometimes can be detected in the image. The interaction between Carl and Cixi particularly played an important role in the creation of Carl’s paintings since they had a close encounter and unique interrelationship during Carl’s stay in the Chinese court. Therefore, analyzing the information provided by Carl’s memoir and Deling’s observations, I lay out how Cixi created and managed her image for the West through her interactions with Carl. For Cixi, commissioning a foreign artist to paint her portraits was part of her diplomatic strategy; as a result, she needed images that she regarded good enough to be shown to the West. On one hand, Cixi directly instructed Carl to treat her portraits in a more idealizing way according to Chinese artistic tradition; on the other hand, she cautiously dealt with her daily contacts with the painter who eventually
provided a positive portrayal of this Chinese ruler. In the discussion of Vos’s portraits of Cixi, I put more emphasis on his personalized depiction of Cixi, consider his ethnographic approach, and examine how Westerners’ prevailing attitude impacted his interpretation of the Chinese ruler.

Chapter Four concentrates on the socio-historical and political significance and the public exhibition of one of Cixi’s portraits painted by Carl, which was officially presented at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904, and then remained at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington as a national gift of the Qing court. The main approach I apply here is to establish the historical and political context for the exhibition and reception of this painting. The event that a Chinese ruler’s “sacred picture” was publicly displayed in the West and then presented to the United States government marked an important departure from Chinese tradition, and this representation of the Chinese imperial face played an important role in the relationship between China and the United States. In order to better explore and understand Cixi’s reasons for such an innovative act, the political and diplomatic encounters between China and the Western powers, especially the United States, which included the Boxer Rebellion, the Eight Nation Alliance’s intrusion in Beijing, and the Japan-Russia War, are taken into account. With regard to the American parties, I consider the memoir of Sarah Conger, who initiated the idea of exhibiting Cixi’s portrait at the St. Louis World’s Fair, along with the writings of the Fair planners and press articles, to scrutinize the underlying intentions in displaying the Cixi’s likeness at the Fair and the Western public’s
receptions of Cixi’s image. This chapter also considers a variety of literary and visual
depictions of the Qing Empress Dowager found in the Western popular press at that
time to examine how Cixi’s contemporary press influenced Westerners’ reception and
perception of the Chinese ruler.

Historiography and Contribution to Scholarship

Many scholarly writings, which deal with the images produced during the peak of
the Qing Dynasty (the reigns of Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong emperors) offer very
valuable background knowledge to my research: for example, Maxwell K. Hearn’s
article “Qing Imperial Portraiture” discusses the different types and cultural
connotations of the early Qing imperial portraits; Shan Guoqiang’s treatise “Ming Qing
gongting xiaoxianghua (The Ming and Qing Imperial Portraits)” and Nie
Chongzheng’s essay “Dihou huaxiang suotan (A Chitchat of the Emperor and Empress’s
Portraiture)” in Gugong Bowuyuan yuankan (The Palace Museum Journal) provide an
outline of Chinese imperial portraits in terms of their types, artistic features, the
development of the artistic styles, as well as issues about the court painters and system
of the Imperial Painting Academy; Wang Qi’s “Kangxi huangdi xiaoxianghua ji
xiangguan wenti (Portraits of the Emperor Kangxi and Related Issues),” more
specifically explores the authorship issues of Kangxi’s portraits and his attitude toward
the portrait art; Michele Pirazzoli-t’ Serstevens’s journal article “Lang Shining yu
zhongguo shiba shiji diwang xiaoxianghua de fuxing (Giuseppe Castiglione and the
Renaissance in the Chinese Imperial Portraits in the Eighteenth Century China),” investigates the background to the eighteenth century Chinese imperial portraits and the role that Castiglione’s paintings played. However, these writings mention little about Cixi’s portraits.

There are several scholarly publications dedicated to Cixi’s photographs and oil portraits by Katharine Carl and Hubert Vos. Among these writings, Lin Jing’s journal article “Cixi sheying shihua (The History of Cixi’s Photographs),” which was later published as a book Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian (The Collection of Cixi’s Photographs in the Palace Museum), provides an overview of Cixi’s photographs taken by Xunling. In his article, Lin surveys the early history of photography in the Qing court, types of Cixi’s photographs, some technical issues including the imaging process, after-treatment and retouching, and the relevant late Qing court life and culture revealed through these photos. Lin’s writing also cites many Qing court archives, a helpful firsthand resource that records the detailed types and numbers of Cixi’s photographs. However, Lin’s paper is only a brief overview of Cixi’s photographs, lacking more insightful analysis on the art historical issues, such as the association between these photos and the traditional Qing ruler’s portraits, the projection of Cixi’s personal identity, and political function of these photographs in establishing a ruler’s image at home.

In terms of Vos’s portraits of Cixi, the historian Luke S.K Kwong’s two journal articles, “No Shadows: Hubert Vos's Portraits of China's Empress Dowager Cixi” and
“Cixi xiezhao de xubi (The Continuation of Cixi’s Portraits),” reconstruct the encounter between Vos and the Chinese Empress Dowager based on Vos’s private letters and diaries. Kwong’s articles point out that Vos’s activities in the Qing court reflects the cultural and artistic clash and difference between China and the West at end of the Qing Dynasty, and the value of the painter’s perception and opinion of his sitter and patron in surveying Cixi’s character in the history. As a historian whose research interest focuses on late Qing history, Kwong does not probes questions about how Vos represented Cixi and why he did it in such a way.

The academic work that touches Carl’s portraits of Cixi is a section in Ka Bo Tsang’s article “In Her Majesty’s Service: Woman Painters in China at the Court of the Empress Dowager Cixi” published in Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century, which deals with Cixi’s patronage of female artists at the court. Tsang briefly explores Carl’s works in the Qing court, and points out that Carl’s portrait of Cixi that was sent to the St. Louis World’s Fair “promoted Cixi’s image as a symbol of grace.”16 Yet, the more fascinating aspects surrounding the exhibition, presentation, and reception of this portrait of the Chinese Empress Dowager in West remains unstudied.

My thesis explores these relatively unexplored areas of Cixi’s photographic and oil portraits by considering the changing notions and symbolism of the Chinese ruler’s portrait conveyed through Cixi’s images, how Cixi exploited photograph to express her identity and selfhood, the factors that contribute to foreign portraitists’ representations of Cixi, and the role of the official portrait in the diplomatic relations between China
and the West. I also probe the political significance and establish the socio-historical context of Carl’s portrait of Cixi that was displayed in America and then presented to the United States government. Moreover, my discussions of Carl’s portrait of Cixi and the St. Louis World’s Fair contribute to the topic of the public exhibition and reception of the Chinese ruler’s image in the West in specific historical and political circumstances, a topic that has received little research on Chinese art history up to date.
CHAPTER TWO
THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS OF CIXI BY AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER XUNLING

I will begin this study by examining the photographs taken by the Chinese amateur photographer Xunling during 1903-05, as they were initially intended to be used as models for Katharine Carl’s oil portraits. The Empress Dowager Cixi not only frequently commissioned photographic portraits in this new medium, but also was actively involved in the shooting. Moreover, the use of photography remarkably extended notions and functions of Chinese rulers’ images. However, it took photography decades to be accepted as a suitable medium to make the ruler’s portraits by the Qing court after it entered China.17 Therefore, it is necessary to briefly survey the history of photography at the Qing court before turning to the photographic portraits of Cixi.

A Brief History of Photography in the Qing Court

The arrival of photography in China was a by-product of the “Open Door” policy that the Qing government was obligated to implement by the Western powers. Shortly after the birth of photography in Europe in 1839, the Nanjing Treaty between the Qing government and Great Britain was signed in 1842 as a result of the Opium War (1839-42), and it forced the Qing government to open five port cities for international
trade, by means of which photography and foreign photographers set foot in China around 1845. Soon, commercial studios sprouted at these port cities, and by the 1890s photography became a popular medium for making portraits within a wide social spectrum in the open area, in cities such as Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Guangdong.

On the other hand, photography had not been known to the Chinese imperial members until the British and French photographers entered Beijing during the Second Opium War (1856-60), because the technique was not yet popularized in isolated Beijing where only a few foreigners set foot before the War. More importantly, photography was considered as the “heretical trick” by Qing imperial members and the act of capturing an emperor or empress’s likeness with a “dark chamber” and lens was believed to offend and even threaten their “sacred faces.” As a result, during the reigns of the Xianfeng and Tongzhi emperors, photography was not accepted in the Forbidden City and traditional painting was still the dominant medium for executing monarchs’ portraits.

Prince Gong Yixin (1833-98), one of leaders of the Self-Strengthening Movement and the most influential political figure during the late Qing Dynasty, was probably the first Chinese imperial member to come into contact with photography in 1860 when he represented the Qing government to sign the peace treaty with Britain and France after the Second Opium War. Reputedly, he also commissioned the British photographer John Thomson (1837-1921) to take his photographic portrait in 1868. A closer encounter between a Qing imperial member and photography happened in 1885, when Prince Chun Yihuan (1840-91, the Guangxu emperor’s natural father) was appointed to
supervise naval affairs, and went to Tianjin to inspect the navy defenses. In order to strengthen propaganda about the military capacity, Yihuan recruited one of the early Chinese professional photographers Liang Shitai (active during the second half of nineteenth century) and the German photographer Lai Xingke to take documentary pictures for the troops.24 One year later, Yihuan presented these photos that recorded soldiers, the organization system, and scope of the navy to Guangxu emperor, by means of which photography officially made its debut in the Forbidden City. The same year, the Qing court decreed to make “Si An Tu” (The Four Patterns Pictures) to commemorate the loyal and outstanding officers who sacrificed their lives for Qing governance. Impressed by the realistic effect of photographs, Yihuan suggested that these portraits should be painted based on photographs.25 It remains unknown whether this painting project proceeded under Yihuan’s suggestion, but it showed that photography was already accepted by the Manchu upper class at least as an aid in rendering an individual’s likeness. Also, photography appealed to Cixi for its verisimilitude and as an instant imaging technique when these pictures were presented to her.26 However, all photographers active in China at that time were ordinary men who had few opportunities to enter the Forbidden City and no access to the court ladies, so there had been no photographer to take pictures of Cixi until 1903.

In 1903, Cixi commissioned the American painter Katharine Augusta Carl to paint her portrait in oil that was intended for display at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis of 1904 (also known as the St. Louis World’s Fair). In order to be freed from
the boredom of posing, Cixi wanted to find a photographer to take photographs of her that Carl could use as a basis for her paintings. According to account of Rongling and Deling, Cixi’s ladies-in-waiting, their brother Xunling was recommended to fulfill this assignment for the Empress Dowager. Xunling was the second son of Yu Geng (?-1905), the former Chinese Minister to Japan (1895-98) and France (1899-1903), and he had completed his education and learned photography in Europe. Xunling was assigned a position responsible for the electrical installations at the Summer Palaces at the time. His noble lineage enabled him to be selected as Cixi’s “imperial photographer” since it was almost impossible for Cixi to ask “an ordinary professional photographer to the Palace.”

Using the latest photographic equipment in China of the day, Xunling created a series of photographic portraits of Cixi between the years 1903-05. After viewing documentary pictures of the Qing navy and the Russian Czar’s photographic portrait, Cixi had already developed an appreciation for the new medium. Cixi became excited at having her own photos taken as soon as she had such an opportunity. The true-to-life effect of the first portrait taken by Xunling even induced Cixi to compare the photograph with her reflection in the mirror. Cixi’s strong interest in being photographed is clearly indicated by the more than thirty kinds of negatives and seven hundred prints of her recorded in the Qing court archives. For Cixi, photography went beyond serving merely as a substitute for preliminary studies for Carl’s oil portraits; rather, it developed into an independent artistic creation, in which she could actively participate. Moreover, Cixi’s zest for photography, as well as
phonography, clocks, and electricity, also suggested her interest in the novelty of Western technology. As Deling observed, “After the method of taking the photograph had been fully explained to her [Cixi], she commanded one of the eunuchs to stand in front of the camera so that she might look through the focusing glass, to see what it was like. Her Majesty exclaimed: ‘Why is it your head is upside down?’”

The Empress Dowager had visited the photographer’s dark-room, insisting on watching the entire process of developing and printing, and commented that “Well, one is never too old to learn. This is something really new to me.” Every time she commissioned a photograph, Cixi would consult the almanac, and carefully make choices of the auspicious day and moment to shoot, as she usually did for each significant event. According to the detailed account of Cixi’s “Sacred Pictures” in the Qing court archives, most of Cixi’s photos were taken before her seventieth birthday ceremony, and used as gifts awarded to officials (most likely a new use of ruler’s portraits), or hung on the wall in imperial palaces, such as the Le Shou Tang (Hall of Pleasure and Longevity) in the Summer Palace.

Photography, introduced by Westerners, expanded the viewership and the avenue of dissemination of the Chinese monarch’s images. In addition, it not only faithfully represented Cixi’s appearance, but also revealed a forceful female ruler’s inner character, since the revelation of an individual’s personality is essential to a good photographic portrait. Simultaneously, Cixi’s photographs are associated with multi-faceted notions of the portrait, including notions of the ruler’s image and a woman’s image. For
convenience of discussion, I will select a few representative photographs of Cixi, and divide them into three sub-categories to explore their connotations: traditional portraits, which represent Cixi in her courtly dress and are close to conventional Chinese imperial portraits; role-playing images, showing the tableaux in which Cixi was portrayed in the guise of Guanyi, the Bodhisattva of Compassion; and group portraits in the company of her ladies-in-waiting and wives of foreign envoys.37

The Traditional Portraits

Unlike many professional photographers, it was difficult for Xunling to control completely his creative process because all his photos were required to meet Her Majesty’s expectations and gain her approval. The majority of Cixi’s photographs were carefully “staged” and executed in the “directorial” mode.38 Here, not only the photographer, but also the subject was involved in manipulating images.39 Several anecdotes during Xunling’s first shooting session offer glimpses into Cixi’s control of her photographic portraits. When Cixi learned that Xunling had taken a photograph of her as she passed the camera without telling her, she said: “Next time when you are going to take one, let me know so that I may try and look pleasant.” As to the choice of the shooting spot, Cixi wanted to have some photos taken sitting on her throne, “exactly as though she were holding an audience.”40 Initially Cixi wanted to have her portraits taken at the Le Shou Tang—the throne room in the Summer Palace where she gave the daily audience to officials and foreigners. But Xunling failed to take any good photos in
the poor light of this room. So Cixi ordered a temporary studio to be set up, the interior setting of which exactly resembled the adjacent Le Shou Tang.\textsuperscript{41} The subject herself knew how to manipulate her portraits by choosing various details, including expression, props, and dress, and furthermore to establish her identity as a dignified and charming female ruler through images created in the new medium. In other words, the subject had a strong motivation to fashion herself in collaboration with the photographer.\textsuperscript{42} The photographs became a declaration of the self.

The traditional portraits (figures 1-8), in which Cixi was shown individually, seated on the imperial throne or standing, against the backdrop of lavishly painted folding screen, are largely derived from the traditional archetype of Chinese monarchs’ portraits in terms of the symmetrical composition, the strictly frontal pose, and the full-length depiction of the body, which is the most formal mode used for imperial portraits. Cixi much preferred the full-length depiction to the half-length, so the overwhelming majority of Cixi’s photographic portraits are full-length.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, the group of photographs in figure 1-5 representing Cixi rigidly seated on the exquisitely carved sandalwood dragon-throne and staring at the lens with an imperturbable expression, pervasively engages with the sitter’s political identity. Close to Qing formal imperial portraits that identified Qing rulers as “Sons of Heaven” and were hung in the imperial ancestral temple and served the ritual function,\textsuperscript{44} the iconography of these seated portraits explicitly define Cixi’s social status as a powerful ruler. Universally, the sense of sovereign authority suggested through the sitter’s pose, costume, and the
surroundings was essential to a ruler’s portrait no matter what function it served.\textsuperscript{45}

Cixi’s portraits are no exception since she had been the de facto ruler of Qing Empire for nearly a half century. The sumptuousness of the furnishings, such as the bronze lamps in the shape of cranes, incense burners, and folding screens painted with an over life-sized peacock, express the sitter’s exclusive status. The dragon throne in particular confirms that the old lady was holding the power of the Qing Empire. Also, the design of the orchid on her dress was one of her favorite subjects, making a direct reference to her childhood nickname Lan’er (literally means orchid in Chinese).

More literally, the inscriptions on the horizontal tablets of the backdrop incorporated in many photographs, such as figures 1(b), 2, and 4, mark the Empress Dowager’s absolute authority and ambition for power. In figure 1(b) and 2, the characters translate as “The Current Divine Mother Empress Dowager Cixi of the Great Qing Empire Long Live for Ten Thousand Years,” the auspicious words usually wished to emperors. The other one shown in figure 4 is “The Current Divine Mother Empress Dowager Cixi Duan You Kang Yi ZhaoYu Zhuang Cheng Shou Gong Qin Xian Chong Xi of the Great Qing Empire,” sixteen Chinese characters which are additional titles of honor that are specifically given to the emperor, empress, and imperial concubines.

According to regulation, the honorific name was awarded when a celebration was held, and usually two characters of additional titles of honor were given at any one time. By end of her life, however, the length of Cixi’s honorific names reached a total of sixteen characters, only four characters less than the longest one, belonging to the Empress
Dowager Xiaozhuang (1613-88), mother of the Shunzhi emperor (1638-61, reigned 1644-61), who was known for her wisdom and female virtues, and the most respected woman of the Qing dynasty. It is clear that Cixi was attempting to proclaim her unparalleled status in every possible way and on every occasion.

Another appealing aspect of photography to Cixi was the instant imaging process that allowed her to be the co-creator of her own images. Photography allowed Cixi to more actively display various states and showcase her refined dress and accessories, sense of fashion, and charming appearance at will, and therefore, Cixi would frequently change costumes and ornaments during the shooting. The group of photographs (figures 6, 7, and 8), in which Cixi seems relatively spontaneous in pose, leaning on a table or standing at ease beside a tall flower stand, convey more about the idea of feminine beauty than personal virtues and political power. In particular, the photo that represents Cixi holding a mirror in one hand while inserting a flower into her hair with the other (figure 8), reminds us of Chinese traditional painting of beauties (meiren tu), for instance, the Qing court painter Jin Tingbiao’s painting A Court Lady Is Dressing up Herself in figure 9. Painting of beauties had a long history in China and eventually developed into a subcategory of figural paintings. Usually, this genre represents young and beautiful women (either alone or grouped) holding flowers, looking at mirrors, or seated in contemplation in garden or boudoirs, and emphasizes the notion of women’s brilliance, sumptuousness, and loneliness.

In terms of Cixi’s posing and the backdrops, this photograph closely resembles
conventional paintings of the beautiful lady. However, Cixi’s image appears somewhat ironic and ridiculous because the old Empress Dowager’s pose of gazing at her own reflection in the mirror and dressing up was conventionally used to depict young women in Chinese figural paintings, suggesting that the lady is thinking of her lover, indulging in self-admiration, or sinking into the “spring longing.” Why did the Empress Dowager choose to pose in such a narcissistic and affected manner that is inappropriate for an older woman? In fact, this photograph vividly suggests Cixi’s concerns about appearance, anxiety to maintain her charm, and sentimental attachment to the youthful years in the sunset of her life. Born into an ordinary Manchu family, Cixi stood out among the other consorts and received Xianfeng’s favor by means of her beauty and wit. Obviously, beauty was extremely crucial to all her “achievements,” thus it is not difficult to understand Cixi’s concerns with keeping good-looks especially when she became aged. By presenting herself in a demeanor more suitable for a lovely young lady, Cixi could complete a recollection of her best time in life.

The Role-Playing Photographs

The second category of Cixi’s photographic portraits consists of photographs representing her in the guise of Guanyin (Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion) on a theatrical stage (figure 10, 11, and 12). Upon the development of Buddhism in China, Avalokitesvara evolved into a female form associated with ideas of fertility and mercy, and then became one of the most popular Buddhist deities and a
special patron of women.\textsuperscript{51} Cixi initiated the idea of dressing as Guanyin and staging the theatrical moment. According to court archives, a variety of props, including costumes, boats, and oars, were carefully set up.\textsuperscript{52} Cixi, acting as a play director in collaboration with her cast, created masquerade images to assist her in demonstrating her selfhood and individual identity as a woman of great compassion that was crucial in a particular historical context. In this respect, the objectivity of photography was challenged since these photographs represent how the sitter wished to be presented, rather than what she was. In these tableaux, Cixi usually wore a cap adorned with the image of Vairocana Buddha and the Five-Buddha crown, holding a water bottle in her left hand, and a mala (rosary) or willow branches in her right hand; her first chief eunuch Li Lianying often played the role of Weituo, the Bodhisattva Skanda, one of the protectors of Buddhism, or Shancai tongzi, the Virtuous Boy; her ladies-in-waiting, such as the Sigege (the Fourth Princess, daughter of Prince Qing Yikuang), played the role of various fictional nymphs. As the protagonist, Cixi was seated at the center of a theatrical stage that was designed as the waves of Southern Seas surrounded by artificial lotus plants, against a backdrop painted with rocks, a bamboo ravine, and mountains. In addition, Cixi also commissioned a traditional painting representing herself as Guanyin and Li Lianying as Weituo (figure 13), which suggests Cixi’s preference for this subject.\textsuperscript{53} I will consider the following three aspects in discussing connotations of these photographs.

First, these role-playing scenes can be understood as manifestations of Cixi’s
religious devotion. Cixi was a faithful believer of Vajrayana Buddhism, and her residential palaces incorporated Buddhist halls and images so that Cixi could worship Buddha every morning and evening. On the first and fifteenth days of every month (according to the Chinese lunar calendar), she abstained from eating meat for the entire day. In addition, Cixi kept up transcribing and reciting the Buddhist scripture over the years. At this point, playing the role of one of the Buddhist deities served to announce Cixi’s devout religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{54}

Secondly, Cixi was a devotee of Peking opera, and one of her main leisure activities was watching the opera. There are several theaters in the imperial palaces, including the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace, and theatrical troupes regularly performed for Cixi, who was even involved in revising some scripts.\textsuperscript{55} The process of dressing up for the photographic shoots enabled Cixi to enjoy the amusement of theatrical performance and to play the role of her ideal. It was not Cixi’s invention to play fictive roles in images. In the peak of the Qing Dynasty, the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors, especially the latter, commissioned a large number of portraits representing themselves in a variety of imaginative roles, such as Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, a Confucian scholar, and a Daoist priest in fictional settings.\textsuperscript{56} Maxwell Hearn points out that the two emperors not only gratified their egos by playing roles of powerful deities or idealized persona, but also looked on the impersonation as a pastime to amuse themselves.\textsuperscript{57} Cixi’s photographs have stronger entertainment value than their predecessors since the Empress Dowager could enjoy the experience of stage
performance by the dressing up and posing in person.

Finally and most importantly, these costume portraits reflect the Empress Dowager’s assertion of her identity. In fact, Yongzheng and Qianlong, especially the latter, also understood how to construct his political and cultural identity through portraits in disguise. In addition to playing roles of fictional figures, these two emperors were depicted in Han style costumes in many images that did not conform to reality either, for instance the remarkable works *Spring’s Peaceful Message* and *The Qianlong Emperor Merrymaking*. Regarding these images, art historians explain that, on one hand, the Manchu Emperors, such as Qianlong, non-Chinese by origin and alien to traditional Han culture, wanted to stress his role of a “Chinese emperor,” or, to legitimize his ruling over China; on the other hand, Qianlong declared his attention of being the role model of both virtuous ruler and Confucian sage. In a similar way, the Empress Dowager’s role-playing photographs clearly convey her self-identification as a merciful Buddhist deity and intention of making up her public image.

As mentioned above, Cixi was a pious Buddhist, and especially a disciple of Guanyin. In Deling’s memoir, she recorded what Cixi said about the “dressing up” photographs:

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...as it makes me remember that I am looked upon as being 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.

Apparently, for Cixi, role-playing became a means of affirming the benevolent
aspects of her character and virtues. For the Empress Dowager, such self-fashioning had its special socio-historical context. Cixi had been historically portrayed as a forceful, dangerous, and autocratic female ruler for her apparent ambitions and craving for power. In her era, Cixi’s early rule “behind the curtain” was considered illegitimate because Qing imperial regulations did not allow women to engage in politics. After the defeat of the Hundred Day’s Reform of 1898 and the Beijing Siege in 1900, Cixi was portrayed as a despot who imprisoned Guangxu emperor and completely grabbed power by reformists such as Kang Youwei and foreign journalists. Thus, in both China and the West, her public persona was quite distinct from the lenient Bodhisattva of Compassion. Aware of the criticism, Cixi primarily used these fancy dress portraits to soothe and comfort herself. Moreover, in the archival records, one of the “dressing up” portraits was developed into ten prints, and presumably it would be disseminated outside the court by Cixi. Before long, one of these role-playing photographic portraits was mass-produced and circulated in market by a Japanese publisher. In this case, these photographs provided a tool for Cixi to remedy or modify her image into that of a merciful woman against the public criticism when they were shown to more audience. In other words, Cixi’s masquerade portraits may also have served as a weapon of self-defense against those offensive and negative assessments. These portraits can also be read as the assertion of Cixi’s political role. Cixi visually presented her supreme status and absolute authority as the incarnation of a Buddhist deity, as she entitled herself the “Old Buddha.” Shrouding herself within a divine aura, Cixi projected her
ability and legitimacy to rule and protect the Qing Dynasty.

The Group Photographic Portrait

Xunling also captured several shots that document Cixi’s daily life with her court attendants, and her meetings with wives of foreign envoys, among which the group portrait in figure 14 is the most unique. This photograph represents Cixi with Sarah Conger, Xunling’s daughter, and other foreign ladies at Le Shou Tang in the Summer Palace where Cixi was in residence, dealing with political affairs and receiving foreign envoys. Contextualizing this portrait will give us a better understanding of the socio-historical significance of this group of women at a particular time, as well as Cixi’s complex attitude toward foreigners at the turning point of 1900 when the Eight Nation Alliance invaded Beijing.

Before 1900, Cixi’s dislike for foreigners was obviously expressed and she seldom received them because they had humiliated the Qing government and questioned her rule behind-the-scene. In her reminiscence, Deling wrote, “Old Buddha always hated foreigners,” and Cixi herself said: “I would be the happiest woman in the world today if there were only some way to rid China of them [foreigners] forever!”66 After the defeat of the Hundred Day’s Reform, during which gossip circulated at court about how the young Guangxu emperor was mistreated and imprisoned by her, Cixi made up her mind to develop contact with Westerners by inviting foreign envoys’ wives to the tea parties she held in the Sea Palaces. Cixi attempted to show foreigners that the Emperor was
well-treated, and to manage her public image in the Western envoys’ eyes.\textsuperscript{67}

This unusual “tea party” diplomatic strategy did, to a certain degree, change foreign ministers’ impression about the Empress Dowager. For instance, Sir Claude Macdonald (1852-1915), the Minister of Britain to China (1896-1900), reported to the Foreign Office that “the Empress Dowager made a most favorable impression by her courtesy and affability.” His wife, Mrs. Macdonald also commented in a British journal that “Cixi was a woman of some strength of character, certainly genial and kindly.”\textsuperscript{68}

Nevertheless, these tea parties were not able to save Beijing and the Forbidden City from invasion by the Eight Nation Alliance in 1900, which forced Cixi to flee to Xi’an for refuge. In 1901, Cixi returned to Beijing and resumed her “international” tea gatherings at the Summer Palace. Although Cixi seemed much friendlier, and tried her best to fawn upon foreigners, the tension between them still existed. According to Sterling Seagrave, these gatherings actually became occasions that were rife with jealousies and strife among the women who attended, as well as displays of the Westerners’ defiance toward China and the Chinese.\textsuperscript{69} Cixi was sensitive to some Western women’s manner, and she told Deling, “they [foreigners] seem to think we are only Chinese and do not know anything, and look down upon us. I notice these things very quickly and am surprised to see people who claim to be well educated and civilized acting the way they do.”\textsuperscript{70}

Consequently, the “tea party” not only functioned as a channel for Cixi to establish informal communications with foreigners, but also fulfilled her aim of showing off her
majesty, open mindedness, and material sumptuousness. Cixi enjoined her court ladies to carefully dress up when meeting with foreign ladies, which reveals Cixi’s attempt at flaunting the best to foreigners. Figure 14 records a scene of a gathering that was taken around 1903. Here, flanked by Western ladies Cixi sits on the dragon throne, wearing her impressively exquisite pearl mantle. The arrangement of figures is well balanced, keeping with Chinese traditional taste. In Chinese visual convention, rulers and attendants are rendered in hierarchic size to suggest rulers’ supreme status.

Although the manipulation of sitters’ size could not be achieved in photographs, Cixi announced her authority and dignity to foreigners by positioning herself as the center of the picture and keeping a polite distance from them. Therefore, the arrangement of figures creates a sense that foreign ladies surround Cixi who seated in the throne as if they were her court attendants, rather than important guests or friends in equal status.

The kind of placement of figures, which is also shown in other group photographs representing Cixi and her court attendants, reveals Cixi and foreigners’ subtle relationship and Cixi’s concerns with projection of her status. There is almost nothing to show these women’s intimacy and the awkwardness of foreign ladies’ posing and face further suggests their unfamiliarity and unease on such occasions. The difference in these ladies dresses is highlighted, especially the dark color of Conger’s costume is distinctly different from other ladies’, which implies their unfriendly, at least discordant relationship because the tea party itself served as a special diplomatic “battlefield,” and they were in fact competing with each other.
The close encounter between Cixi and foreign ladies certainly offered an opportunity to reshape the image of the Qing Empress Dowager that had been smeared by Western missionaries and the news media. In the forward of her published letters, Conger observed, “Her Imperial Majesty's [Dowager Cixi] forty-seven years' reign proved the heart and mind quality which made a strong character… The Empress Dowager of China was a great woman…” Compared to Sir and Lady Macdonald’s moderate comments on Cixi, Conger’s view seems more positive and emotional. As a result of her admiration for Cixi as well as diplomatic considerations, Conger proposed to have Cixi’s portrait painted and exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition of 1903, and recommended the American portraitist Katharine Augusta Carl to undertake this peculiar painting commission, which will be the subject of the next chapter.

Dissemination of Cixi’s Photographs

In spite of similarities with painted portraits, the photographic portraits of Cixi were distinctly different from their antecedents in terms of their reproducible quality. The gelatin silver print technique Xunling applied was able to develop glass negatives into multiple copies, which could thus be viewed or accessed by a larger audience. Cixi would pick her favorite pictures and would have them developed into large-size prints (usually half-life size, 30 by 24 inches), which were then brightly hand-colored and mounted into exquisite frames for hanging, for example, in figures 1 and 3. In the West, it has been common that rulers’ portraits were presented in public ceremonies to
announce the royal power and ruler’s authority. In addition, since ancient Egypt and Imperial Rome, rulers’ or powerful political figures’ images were mass-produced and circulated in the forms of coins, medallions, or stamps throughout their ruling territory. Unlike their Western counterparts, conventional Chinese rulers’ portraits were neither displayed nor circulated in public. The earlier Chinese rulers’ portraits were confined to the imperial enclosure and viewed by the emperors themselves and a certain audiences who had opportunities to enter the imperial palaces.

The Empress Dowager Cixi seemed more “open-minded” than her predecessors in displaying her images. Reputedly inspired by Queen Victoria’s portrait on British stamps, the Qing Post had attempted to issue a series of commemorative stamps with Cixi’s portrait to celebrate her sixtieth birthday. It turned out that this commemorative series was circulated using auspicious patterns instead of Cixi’s portrait, as several officials were afraid that they would be punished if the Old Buddha’s “sacred face” was postmarked with carelessness. Although the plan of printing Cixi’s image on stamps did not come to fruition, it suggests that the Qing upper class, presumably including Cixi herself, had already recognized the possibility of making multiple copies and of circulating ruler’s image within a wider social spectrum, and the potential of how this distribution helped to establish and restate royalty by the end of the nineteenth century.

When Cixi found out that photography allowed making multiple copies practicable, she did not hesitate to take advantage of this new technology. According to the Qing Archive, most negatives each have more than forty copies, and one of her favorite
portraits was developed into more than one hundred prints. These numerous photos were exhibited at different locations in the Summer Palace, such as Le Shou Tang, or were bestowed upon officials and therefore dispersed outside the court. In 1904, a Japanese publisher who lived in Shanghai made a large quantity of copies of Cixi’s photographs, and publicly advertised and sold them in Shanghai, which suggested the availability of Cixi’s photographic portraits to the public. According an advertisement in a newspaper *Shibao* of 1904, one of Cixi’s portraits in disguise of Guanyin, one of her formal and traditional portrait, and two group photographs representing Cixi and her court attendants were priced and advertised for sale. Hubert Vos had recalled that he had seen photographs of the Empress Dowager Cixi for sale in the shop windows in Tianjin during his second sojourn in China in 1905. Vos also discovered that a Japanese photographer S. Yamamoto had taken a photograph of Cixi, whose negative was destroyed, but copies were distributed to the diplomatic missions and foreign royal houses by the Qing court and he was able to “get one on a secret loan from the Dutch minister.” In 1906, photographs of Cixi and Guangxu were published in a picture catalogue titled *Zhongwai erbai mingren zhaoxiang quan* (Two Hundred Photographs of Famous Persons in China and Abroad). This act might not be officially implemented, but was likely known to the Qing court. The Chinese ruler’s images were widely disseminated in China to an unprecedented degree, which was a departure from the Chinese tradition.

The visibility of a ruler’s likeness created by multiple copies does have its political
value in establishing the sovereign and assuring authority, since the copies can create a sense of rulers’ “omnipresence,” and make the ruler’s images “consolidated” on their subjects’ minds. Compared to portraits produced in the era of Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong emperors, which were used to legitimize their rule and magnify their authority, such as *Portraits of Emperors of Successive Dynasties* painted by Yao Wenhan and *The Qianglong Emperor Reviewing the Grand Parades of Military Troops* (*Da yu tu*), Cixi’s solemn and stately photographic portraits more completely implemented the function of asserting control of the Manchu court and consolidating the turbulent Qing Empire. It is because the reproducible quality enabled Cixi’s images to be more broadly viewed by those who had had little opportunity to view the “sacred face” of the Emperor or Empress Dowager. Cixi’s photographs strengthened the propaganda of the court’s reign and conveyed her authority, which was extremely important during periods of internal trouble, including the Reformists’ opposition, and foreign invasion. In addition, some Westerners, such as the *New York Times* journalists, were amazed at the fact that Cixi’s portraits could be made by the advanced technology. At this point, photographs also helped Cixi to proclaim herself as a modernized ruler of a “Great Qing Empire” that was in progress too.
Since the early eighteenth century, Qing emperors had often commissioned works by European artists, who came to China along with Jesuit missionaries to produce historical paintings, architectural decorations, and imperial portraits using Western techniques, including techniques of modeling with light and shadow, and foreshortening. Western painters, such as the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining, 1688-1766), the French Jesuit Jean Denis Attiret (Wang Zhicheng, 1702-1768), and the Bohemian artist Ignatius Sickeltart (Ai Qimeng, 1709-1780), served at the Qing court during the reigns of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong emperors, and had a strong impact on Qing imperial painting. European painters usually collaborated with Chinese painters on painting projects, taking charge of executing only part of an art work, such as the face, dress, or carpet. And therefore, many court paintings of this era (1662-1795) exemplify the amalgamation of the two distinct artistic styles and techniques of East and West.

Although the early Qing rulers had strong interests in the naturalistic effects created in oil paintings and advocated the serious adoption of Western painting approaches to a degree, they seemed indifferent to having their own portraits painted in
complete Western style. The Qing emperors did not appreciate the chiaroscuro effects caused by the play of light and shadow that was typically used to achieve a three-dimensional effect in rendering subjects. Indeed, Kangxi clearly expressed his dislike of Western-style portraits.\textsuperscript{90} Qianlong required Castiglione and Attiret to learn Chinese painting skills and diminish their use of shadowing in order to satisfy his taste.\textsuperscript{91} As a consequence, compared to the vast number of portraits executed in traditional Chinese media, the extant imperial oil portraits painted during the reigns of the three emperors are relatively rare, including two portraits of the Kangxi emperor,\textsuperscript{92} *Portrait of the Yongzheng Emperor in the Guise of a Western Gentleman*, Castiglione’s *The Qianlong Emperor Playing a Zither* and *Portrait of a Lady in Martial Attire*, Attiret’s *The Qianlong Emperor Shooting an Arrow, and* four portraits of the Qianlong’s Empress and high ranking concubines.\textsuperscript{93} It is worth noting that the four portraits of Qianlong’s consorts might have been painted as studies for the formal portraits that would be hung on ritual occasions. A similar case is the *Portrait of the Kangxi Emperor Seated Reading*, which looks more likely a study of a painting of the same subject but in the Chinese traditional medium.\textsuperscript{94} Thus, the oil portraits in the early Qing court were not treated as an independent and serious painting project. Another interesting phenomenon is that all the extant oil portraits of early Qing emperors were painted on thickened traditional paper, rather than canvas.\textsuperscript{95} In addition, the earlier Qing rulers rarely gave formal sittings for painters to make studies or preliminary sketches. The court painters, including the Western artists, would paint rulers’ portraits
relying only on their memory and observations in daily life.

It thus seems that the early Qing emperors did not attach importance to oil portraits. They might have deemed the Western oil portrait a novelty or curiosity, but unworthy of serious and complete adoption. After these European artists died or left China, there was little oil painting created in the Qing court until the early twentieth century when the Empress Dowager commissioned Katharine Carl to paint her oil portraits. Compared to her predecessors, Cixi more fully accepted the Western medium. She commissioned two Western portraitists, Katharine Carl and Hubert Vos, to paint several oil portraits over a period of three years, and also acted in concert with her foreign portraitists’ working mode to a certain degree by giving them several sittings and providing comfortable working conditions. Yet, this does not mean that the late Qing Empress Dowager really appreciated the oil portraits. In fact, it is the particular international relationship and political climate that Cixi faced that compelled her to employ foreign artists to produce her portrait in a Western way. During the production process of Carl’s portraits, Cixi carefully managed her image in order to improve her reputation in the West, which her predecessors were not required to do. Finally, Cixi’s efforts had an impact on the positive rendering of her portraits and left a good impression on her portraitist Katharine Carl.

More significantly, the intention of one of Carl’s oil portraits of Cixi also differed from earlier Qing emperors in terms of its public display and propaganda, since it was primarily intended to be shown to Westerners in a completely foreign environment—the
St. Louis World’s Fair, rather than to Chinese audiences or foreigners in China. Furthermore, this portrait was presented to the United States government as a diplomatic gift by the Empress Dowager. Therefore, Carl’s oil portraits of Cixi became a real departure from the traditional Chinese rulers’ images.

In this chapter, I examine the production of these oil portraits and explore how Katharine Augusta Carl and Hubert Vos represented Cixi. I consider what impact factors, including Cixi’s demands and requirements, Chinese artistic conventions, and Western contemporary artistic tendencies had on the execution of these images, and what these portraits reveal about Western artists’ personal understanding of Cixi as a female ruler, which were derived both from their interactions with the Empress Dowager and from the prevailing propagandas about Cixi in the West. I especially elaborate upon how Cixi created and managed her image for the West: on one hand, she was directly involved in the creation of her portraits; on the other hand, she cautiously dealt with Katharine Carl, which had an impact on the effect of her portraits. In the following chapter, I address the significance of Carl’s portrait of Cixi in terms of its exhibition and propaganda.

Katharine Carl’s Portraits of Cixi

Katharine Augusta Carl was born in New Orleans and received her art training at the Académie Julian in Paris under Gustave Courtois (1853-1923). In 1902, Carl traveled to China with her mother, possibly to visit her brother Francis Carl, who had
worked with Sir Robert Hart at the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service since 1881. It was at this time that she befriended Sarah Conger. Before this time, she had already become acquainted with the Yu sisters, Rongling and Deling, the Empress Dowager’s ladies-in-waiting, and had painted a portrait of Deling. This was during the Yu sisters’ stay in Paris with their father Yu Geng, who served as the Minister of China to France from 1899 to 1903. In 1903, at Conger’s suggestion, Cixi agreed to have her portrait painted by Carl and to have the painting exhibited at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 in St. Louis. Prior to her arrival in China, Carl’s art works had been exhibited at the Chicago Columbian Exhibition of 1893, the Paris International Exposition of 1900, and the Paris Salon. Considered only a mediocre artist, Carl did not make her mark in European and American art circles until she attained this imperial painting commission. She received the commission owing largely to her gender, for a foreign male was not allowed to stay in the imperial sanctum and have close contact with court ladies. There was, of course, another important factor that mattered in Cixi’s choice of Carl as her portraitist: Carl was recommended by Conger. After the brutal invasion of the Eight Nation Alliance in Beijing, Cixi feared to refuse foreigners’ requests and to offend them again. As a result, although Cixi hesitated to have a foreign artist stay in her palace since she worried that Carl might be exposed to gossip that could create a negative impression of Cixi if she had close contact with members of the Qing court, Cixi eventually gave her consent for the portrait.

Carl spent nine months at the Qing court with the Empress Dowager Cixi and court
ladies between 1903 and 1904. In the beginning, Carl was provided an apartment in the Palace Garden of Prince Chun Yihuan for her accommodation, and later assigned makeshift studios and rooms for rest in different imperial palaces, including the Summer Palace, the Forbidden City, and the Sea Palace. Carl produced four oil portraits of Cixi, and only two of them are extant today: one was sent to the St. Louis World’s Fair and eventually presented to the United States government as an official gift of China and remains in the US, and the other remains at the Palace Museum in Beijing (figure 15).\textsuperscript{102}

Figure 15 appears to be the first of four portraits of Cixi that Carl embarked on according to her memoir: “This first portrait represented the Empress Dowager sitting on one of her favorite Cantonese carved Thrones. The figure was life-size. In one hand she held a flower, and the other lay over a yellow cushion...she was clothed in her official costume of Imperial yellow.”\textsuperscript{103} The slight three-quarter view and Cixi’s relaxed pose give this portrait an informal quality and relaxing atmosphere. In the meantime, Cixi chose the bright yellow gown whose color she thought to be the “best for the portrait” although she actually disliked it.\textsuperscript{104} It is not difficult to understand Cixi’s attempt to convey a sense of her dignity and grandeur by dressing in the color that symbolized transcendent power and status.\textsuperscript{105} The sitter’s Manchu coiffure, jewels, and ornate dress were depicted with Western realistic details; at the same time, the distinction between Eastern and Western art is remarkably blurred in terms of the rendering of the sitter: there is no indication of folds in the robe and sleeves, and Cixi’s
face was painted flatly in a soft tint without shadows so it appears more smooth and youthful than her real appearance. Cixi’s preference for the unrealistic and almost two-dimensional depiction of her face was not only because she wanted to achieve a flattering effect, but also originated from the Chinese traditional aesthetic, which considered shadows on the sitter’s face ugly and unauspicious. Such a taboo was known to all those surrounding Cixi, and the photographer Xunling also cautiously avoided depicting shadows on Her Majesty’s face in photographic portraits.106

Carl’s portrait that was sent to the St. Louis Exposition (figure 16) was the grandest of the four paintings, and its dimensions, decided by Cixi herself, were ten by six feet instead of eight by five that Carl planned.107 Many other details, such as the teakwood throne and hand position, were also determined by the royal sitter too, although the painter disliked them. Differing from all its precedents, this image of a Chinese monarch was intended to be displayed in the international public area and to be viewed by numerous Westerners, and therefore Cixi attached great importance to it. Compared with the portrait that remained in China, this image seems much more formal and solemn, and the sitter’s self-assurance is manifested by directly gazing out from the canvas at the viewer. In this “state portrait,”108 the magnificent scale, the symbolic paraphernalia including ceremonial fans, folding screen, and crane censers, as well as the representation of nine phoenixes in the background, were all dictated by Cixi and together make a reference to the sitter’s political status. The royalty and authority of the sitter is reinforced by the inclusion of Cixi’s jade seal bearing the words “Ci Xi Huang
Tai Hou Zhi Bao (Seal of the Empress Dowager Cixi) carried by the central phoenix. Cixi’s dress, although not the ceremonial state gown, was noble enough to express her role as the paramount ruler of the Qing Empire, since the mantle she wore was made of pearls from northeastern China, whose use was strictly regulated at the Qing court. In addition, an amateur artist herself, Cixi was involved in designing the painting’s exquisite frame that was decorated with auspicious motifs and custom-made for this portrait.

Invariably fastidious about timing, Cixi carefully chose the auspicious date and moment by which Carl was required to complete the portrait. When the fixed moment for completion arrived, a simple ceremony was arranged, and Sarah Conger and wives of the Ministers and First Secretaries of Legations were invited to view the “sacred likeness.” In the following days, male nobles, princes, and other higher officials, as well as many foreign Ministers and their staff were allowed to view the portrait before it was shipped to the United States, and Xunling was ordered to make a photograph of it for documentary purposes.

Again, the effect that Chinese pictorial tradition had on this image is evident. This portrait shows a close connection with Qing imperial formal portraits in terms of the strictly balanced composition, frontal pose, and resplendent setting. The Western naturalistic manner, in which the objects surrounding Cixi are treated, and the flat rendition of the sitter’s face with minimized shadows draw a contrast between the two artistic traditions. A more interesting phenomenon showing the amalgamation of
Chinese and Western cultures occurs in colophons on this portrait. There is an inscription in Chinese at the pole of the right fan that states “Guangxu jiachen nian gonghui (Humbly painted in the year of Jiachen of the Guangxu emperor’s reign)”\textsuperscript{114} and the term gonghui, “humbly painted” or “painted with reverence,” is typically written by Chinese court painters, including European artists, on their works to show the respect to monarchs whom they served.\textsuperscript{115} Meanwhile, Carl signed her name at the left corner of the composition as Western artists generally did. When Cixi saw Carl’s English autograph, she complained: “Fancy putting her own name on my pictures. This will naturally convey the impression that it is a portrait of Miss Carl, and not a portrait of myself at all.”\textsuperscript{116} The coexistence of the artist’s signature in the Western manner, the traditional Chinese words of respect, and the tablet with Cixi’s appellation indicate the compromise and comingling of different cultural customs.

Moreover, the discernible similarities between the painted portraits and some of Xunling’s photographs, such as the painting’s photographic exactitude in setting and props, the somber composition, and the full-length rendering, show the influence of photographs on Carl’s painting although Carl mentioned little about the fact that she painted these portraits based on Xunling’s photographs because she wished to defend the prestige of the academic tradition. However, compared to the photographs, Carl’s painted portraits of Cixi are rather more idealized and beautified in terms of the depictions of Cixi’s facial features. Even though the paintings and photographs were executed within the same time span, Cixi looks much younger in the paintings. On one
hand, Carl certainly needed to cater to her patron’s vanity; on the other hand, the flattering portrayal was relevant to the painter’s favorable impression of her sitter. Although Carl was swayed by her royal patron in terms of the use of certain artistic techniques and the choice of various details, she conveyed her own interpretation of Cixi in these portraits to a certain degree. Contrary to Cixi’s public image in the West as a forceful ruler, ferocious murderer, and plotter of the Beijing Siege, Carl represented Cixi not only as the dignified and intelligent Empress, but also as an amiable and beautiful lady, which is highlighted through the depictions of Cixi’s gorgeous costumes, tender gaze, and gracefully posed hands. In both images, Cixi’s facial expression seems fairly gentle and relaxed with a slight smile. In contrast, most photographs accurately captured and represented the stern and tough side of Cixi’s personality.

The Empress Dowager’s Management of Her Image

During Carl’s sojourn in the Qing Court, her experiences, on the one hand, were enjoyable in that she was invited to participate in Cixi’s daily activities, including promenades, watching theatrical performances, as well as in various celebrations and festival events. Carl felt happy and excited to learn about Chinese and Manchu culture and customs and the imperial life. She made numerous sketches of court ladies and servants, as well as varied scenes in the Summer Palace and the Forbidden City. On the other hand, Carl became more and more frustrated when she embarked on her paintings of Cixi as she had to yield to Cixi’s living schedule and habits. After the technique
and the need for many sittings was explained, Cixi questioned why Western artists needed to have the sitter and all the various props in their presence while painting, since “in China it was only necessary for an artist to see his subject once, after which he could start right away and finish the portrait in a very short time.” According to Deling, after giving a few long sittings, Cixi refused to do any more, and even ordered the Yu sisters to pose for the painter in her costumes and jewels so that Carl could finish most parts of the painting except for the sitter’s facial features.

Moreover, Carl was obliged to conform to Cixi’s personal preferences and to Chinese artistic conventions. The period in which these oil portraits were produced witnessed dramatic conflicts between Chinese and Western art and culture. When the painting project was proposed, Cixi did not know what an oil portrait was or how it was executed. When Cixi saw Deling’s portrait by Carl for the first time, she observed, “Such rough work I never saw in all my life. The picture itself is marvelously like you.” Notwithstanding, while Cixi appreciated the vivid and realistic effect that oil portraits created, she did not understand or accept many aspects of Western painting, such as the modeling of light and shade on the figure’s face or changes in color caused by light falling on the surface of an object, which Cixi regarded as “not natural.”

Cixi told Deling that since her portrait would be sent to the United States she did not “want the people over there [America] to imagine that half of my face is white and half black.”

The Empress Dowager’s incomprehension of Western art and desire to control her
images was so strong that Carl was restrained in painting her portraits. What Carl initially dreamed of painting was a portrait full of fantasy: “Her Majesty in one of her Buddha-like poses…I should have placed one of those huge Palace braziers, its blue flames leaping into the air…the whole enveloped in the soft azure smoke of incense. Across the base of the picture, under her feet, should have writhed and sprawled the rampant double dragon.” However, these fantasies were not approved by Her Majesty. Thus, Cixi’s portraits, though executed in the oil medium by a Western artist, are in keeping with traditional Qing monarchs’ formal portraits to a large degree. The Chinese artistic elements, such as the imposing and somber setting, the symmetrical composition, diminished perspective, and flatness of the sitter’s face, and many details including the dimensions and the choice of costume and pose, mainly came from the sitter Cixi’s instructions. As to the compromise between her ideals and Chinese convention, Carl complained, “I had now resigned myself to convention and tradition, and I copied mechanically what was placed before me, and made no more efforts at artistic arrangements, nor tried any experiments in execution. I worked like a good artisan, finishing so many inches a day.”

The Empress Dowager’s management of her image lies not only in the direct interference and imperative instructions in creating Carl’s portraits, but also in the way in which she deliberately manipulated her image in the presence of foreigners. That is, the way in which Cixi treated and interacted with foreigners, especially the hospitality and politeness she showed toward her American portraitist, did have a strong impact on
the execution of the portraits painted by Carl. After the Boxer Rebellion, Cixi cared very much about how foreigners looked upon her and tried to appease the Western Powers. One of Her Majesty’s greatest concerns was that Carl might make a negative impression of her, a negative impression that could spread in the West.127

As a consequence, Cixi treated Carl with both seeming warmth and constant precautions and vigilance, attempting to make a nice impression on the American artist. Cixi invited Carl to participate in her leisure activities, offered her ostentatious living conditions, gave generous presents to Carl,128 and even ordered the studio to be remodeled according to the painter’s requests.129 According to Rongling, Carl was an unprepossessing person in the Qing court since she did know the necessary court etiquette. Yet, Cixi seldom blamed Carl for her impertinence and created a relaxing environment for the foreign painter.130 Cixi tried to make a nice impression on Carl, and also on Conger. While talking about communication with Carl, she told Deling that “there may be some things which I may want to tell Miss Carl, but which I don’t want Mrs. Conger to know…if Mrs. Conger heard of them [something Cixi told Carl], would give her the impression that I was very difficult to please.”131 When Carl’s painting commission was completed, Cixi paid Carl a handsome fee of ten thousand teals of silver (equivalent to about 1500 guineas), silk, and a double-dragon medallion.132 In the meantime, Cixi took considerable precautions: for example, she asked the Yu sisters to watch Carl all the time so that the painter could have little private communication with anyone else in the Palace, especially with the Emperor.133 Further, Cixi showed good
manners and affability to court attendants and eunuchs and tried not to lose her temper before Carl so that the American lady would not regard her as an uncultured “savage.”

Cixi apparently succeeded in managing her image, playing the role of a capable, gracious, and cultivated female ruler of China in the presence of her American portraitist. Such a positive image of Cixi was both visually and literally represented by Carl, reflecting the artist’s personal and somewhat one-sided observation and feelings toward her sitter. Paralleling the visual portrayal, Carl defended this controversial female ruler in her reminiscences that were published after she returned to the United States. Carl wrote, “She [Cixi] was so considerate and tactful, and seemed so really kind in her relations with those who surrounded her. She was the very embodiment of the Eternal Feminine. She was at once a child and a woman with strong, virile qualities... and she deserves the appellation of ‘man,’ if it goes to mean superior intelligence and executive ability; but it was not the “statesman” that I had the best opportunity of studying. It was the woman in her private life.” Carl’s perceptions of Cixi are indicated in her paintings. In addition, although extremely frustrated by being forced to follow the Chinese conventions and Cixi’s demands, Carl was reluctant to describe Cixi as an opinionated and controlling ruler; instead, the painter preferred to deem her royal patron “artistic and progressive,” defending her by saying that “she [Cixi] also, was obliged to conform to tradition.”

The creative process of the paintings thus clearly indicated Cixi’s desire to make
use of her portrait to improve her reputation in the West. Furthermore, the production of the portraits revealed Cixi’s complex attitude toward foreigners during this particular historical period. On the one hand, after the Boxer Rebellion, the Qing government and Cixi specifically and constantly gave way to the Western powers’ demands, and Cixi’s consent to have her portrait painted by an American artist was itself a friendly gesture to the United States, as well as to the West in general. On the other hand, Cixi’s manipulation of her own portraits reveals her sense of cultural pride over the West. During the production of her oil portraits, Cixi handled Carl with caution, loath to make any bad impressions on the painter; however when artistic conflicts arose between them, she did not hesitate to insist on her ideas and Chinese artistic conventions. She mentioned to Deling, “I admire the foreigners in some ways. For instance, their navies and armies, and engineers, but as regards civilization I should say that China is the first country by all means.” An amateur artist, Cixi’s insistence on the use of Chinese artistic tradition clearly reveals her feelings about the Chinese cultural superiority over the West, although she was aware of the fact that the military, economical, and technological strength of China could not compete with the West.

Hubert Vos’s Commissioned Portrait of Cixi

When Katharine Carl’s portrait of the Qing Empress Dowager was displayed at the St. Louis World’s Fair, one of her fellow portraitists, who also served as the fine arts commissioner for the Dutch art exhibition at the Fair, noticed this image yet thought
little of it. He was later given the opportunity to create his own portraits of the same subject. This was Hubert Vos, the first foreign male painter who was able to enter the Qing imperial palace to paint portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi. Hubert Vos was a Dutch painter who studied art at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, Paris, and Rome, and established his studio in London from 1885 to 1892. As an academic painter, he befriended James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) and helped co-found the Society of British Portrait Painters. In 1892, he was appointed deputy commissioner in charge of the Dutch art exhibit at the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893. During his time in the United States, he grew fond of this “land of Hope and Opportunity,” and eventually became an American citizen. Inspired by the exotic portraits shown at the Chicago World’s Fair, from the late 1890s, Vos became captivated by racial diversity, and began to travel the world, including Hawaii, Malaysia, and East Asia, devoting himself to capturing different ethnic types.

During his first sojourn to China in 1899, Vos made several portraits of eminent Qing statesmen, including Viceroy Li Hongzhang, Prince Qing Yikuang, and General Yuan Shikai. As a result he was regarded as the artist who “broke the ice at the Dragon Court.” When Vos returned to China in 1905, he was recommended by the Dutch Legation to the Foreign Office of the Qing government to paint oil portraits of Mandarins. Finally and unexpectedly, he won the bid for painting the likeness of Cixi, and said “if had known [the subject was Cixi], I might have doubled my price.”

One of the possible reasons why Cixi would commission another foreign artist to
paint her portrait was again for diplomatic purposes. The Chinese Empress Dowager perhaps found that employing a foreign painter did make her look more accessible and friendly to foreigners.\textsuperscript{146} When Vos returned to the United States, he became well-known, and he expressed pride in his own achievements, for “certainly it was compliment enough that I should be the first man whom the Dowager Empress permitted to paint her.”\textsuperscript{147} Travelling from the Summer Palace expressly for the purpose, the Empress Dowager gave Vos five short sittings in the Sea Palace and the Forbidden City. This only allowed Vos to finish his sketch on the small canvas and take photographs for the later large work. Vos executed two portraits of Cixi: one, the official commissioned painting displayed today at the Summer Palace in Beijing (Figure 18); the other (Figure 19), at his own initiative and true to his art, was undertaken after Vos went back to the United States, and based on studies and photographs of Cixi conducted in China. Vos then exhibited this painting at the Paris Salon of 1906. The painting was eventually sold to the Fogg Museum of Harvard University through the Kende Galleries at New York.\textsuperscript{148}

Vos finished his first painting based on studies and photographs at his temporary residence at a hotel in Beijing. It represents Cixi in a flattering way that makes her look less than half of her actual age of seventy-one, seated on the cushioned throne with a fan in hand. The backdrop, decor, and sitter’s costume are rendered with realistic details and precise perspective. Different from Carl’s works, the folds at the lower part of robe are clearly visible, and the chiaroscuro formed by the brightly lit yellow gown of the sitter
and dark furnishings around her reminds us of the painter’s Dutch origin and artistic training. At the same time the Chinese artistic vocabulary comes into play in the balanced arrangement and the idealized treatment of Cixi’s head with minimized shadow, because Vos was confronting the same restriction and frustration Katharine Carl did—the image had to be in keeping with the Chinese artistic tradition and meet the sitter’s requirements. The painter had to paint a “semi-Chinese picture” as if he were Chinese.149

Before the first sitting started, Vos proposed that he wanted a darker background and an asymmetrical composition, but his proposal was rejected since the setting had to follow the Empress Dowager’s wishes and could not be changed. During the second sitting, Cixi took a look at the study Vos had executed during the first sitting, and required Vos to make the eyes open wide, no shadows around the eyes or on the nose, the mouth full and lips up, not drooping, and the eyebrows straight.150 As she did with Carl’s painting, the Empress Dowager continued to control her image by giving instructions regardless of what the artist thought. As a result, the artist had to make a new study according to Her Majesty’s orders. Finally, Vos understood that his sitter wanted a “symbolical and allegorical” monument to commemorate herself as the young Empress of the Qing Empire, rather than a realistic depiction with any indication of decrepitude.151 Thus, the Empress Dowager of China in her late years was represented as a young and beautiful lady on Vos’s canvas.152
Vos’s Personalized Portrayal of Cixi

Perhaps Vos felt that the commissioned portrait painted under the sitter’s influence hardly conveyed his own understanding about the Empress Dowager of China, hence after returning to the United States he undertook another portrait of Cixi based on photographs and studies he produced at the Qing court. This half-length portrait (figure 19), which seems very different from the previous one, could be considered Vos’s more personal portrayal of the Qing female ruler. Getting rid of Cixi’s interference and demands, Vos resolved to render Cixi in his own way: the elderly Qing Empress Dowager, whose age is betrayed by the realistically depicted wrinkles and puffy eyes, sits on the red sandalwood throne against a murky screen covered with flying dragons, boldly staring at viewers out of the canvas with a confident and assertive gaze and stern countenance. The imposing ceremonial props, one of the most remarkable features of Cixi’s other portraits, and the picturesque background in his commissioned work disappeared in this image and were replaced by the murky background painted with fearsome dragons. The gaze of one dragon leads the viewer’s attention to the protagonist, the absolute focus of this image.

Cixi showed a friendly and amicable manner to Vos as she did to Carl during their short meetings. However, her power and strength more impressed Vos, who described his first feelings about his sitter: “Neither on any man’s nor any woman’s face have I ever seen greater will power expressed than on that of her Imperial Highness.” The painter thus visually represented his understanding about the forceful, even masculine
nature of Cixi’s disposition in three ways. First, dissimilar to the realistic way in which minute details of the figure are rendered, it is likely that Vos invented an imaginary dragon screen for the sitter. Employing neither the actual setting in Cixi’s palaces nor the motif of the phoenix represented in both Carl and Xunling’s portraits, Vos adopted the dragon in the background, which not only symbolizes the imperial power and enhances the mysteriousness of Cixi’s life, but also expresses the Empress Dowager’s strength and aggressiveness that could be comparable to a man’s. Moreover, in the Western tradition, the representation of age often symbolizes “authority, wisdom, and experience” particularly for male sitters. In this case, Vos likely intended to indicate Cixi as a sophisticated and authoritative female ruler by depicting signs of aging. Finally, Vos’s choice of a somber palette and gloomy background not only followed his Northern European artistic training, but also helped to emphasize the tough, almost masculine quality of this woman’s character.

In this painting one can also discern exotic elements, one of the characteristics of ethnic portraits that Vos previously produced. The exoticism, which is stressed and highlighted through the detailed depictions of Cixi’s Manchu costume, ornament, and sharp nail protectors, tends to identify this portrait of the Qing Empress Dowager as an image of the “Other.” Vos’s ethnographic approach is also revealed at the background of this image. In most ethnographic portraits, such as portraits of a Hawaiian musician, a Khattack, and the Korean emperor Gojong (reigned 1863-1907), Vos employed a plain dark background to accentuate the sitter. However, he rendered a dragon, the
typical legendary creature that represents the Oriental myth, at the background to
exoticize this image of the Chinese ruler, and therefore enhanced the appeal to its
viewer or potential buyer.

In Europe and America, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed an
increasing interest in racial varieties and ethnography. With the colonialist expansion of
the Western countries, there was a growing market in the West for topographic and
ethnographic images of the American West and of the Orient made by Western artists,
including photographs and paintings that not only served a documentary and
educational function, but also validated the colonial enterprise of various
governments.155 In parallel with visual art, the Western literature about China and Cixi
written at the turn of the twentieth century also featured the exoticism, and the China’s
Empress Dowager indeed embodied something like the “lure of the unknown, the
mysterious, and the far away.”156 Accentuating the exotic quality in Cixi’s portrait, Vos
perhaps sought to cater to this Orientalist market and to satisfy the Westerner’s fantasy
of the Far East Empress and demand for viewing “difference.”

In addition, Vos’s individualized portrait appears, to a certain extent, to respond to
the prevailing stereotypes about Cixi in the Western world since 1900. In other words,
Vos’s depiction of Cixi met Westerners’ common perceptions of the female ruler of the
Qing Empire. Thanks to the foreign press, Cixi was stereotyped as an obstinate,
anti-foreign, and cruel female autocrat. After the Boxer Rebellion, she was tarnished as
almost “an enemy of the human race”157 by various news reports and articles. For
example, George Ernest Morrison (1862-1920), the correspondent of the London Times
to Beijing, blames Cixi as the prime culprit of the Beijing Siege, in which the Legation
Quarter was attacked and a large number of foreigners were killed.158 (The next chapter
will explore Cixi’s image created on and by the Western press in more details.) The
negative comments would have been known to Vos and may have had an impact on his
visual interpretation of Cixi. In Vos’s second work, there is little indication of Cixi’s
female virtues or domestic role; on the contrary, as discussed above, the masculinity,
power, and self-assertion of Cixi are emphasized. The fierce gaze of the flying dragon
and Cixi’s incisive and grim gaze echo each other. And therefore, the fearsome dragons
not only serve as a metaphor of her imperial majesty or as exotic attraction, but also
allude to Her Majesty’s ferociousness and ruthlessness, as the Western press perceived
it.

Dissimilar to the previous European missionary painters, such as Castiglione who
played a dual-role at the Qing court as professional artist and courtier, both Carl and
Vos could express a personal understanding of their imperial sitter to some degree. For
instance, Carl conveyed the sitter’s female charm and queenly manner; on the contrary,
Vos’s rather more personalized depiction of Cixi places emphasis on her toughness and
power. At the same time, both Carl and Vos were also unlike their contemporary fellow
artists who often captured and represented the East and its people from a colonialist
point of view. There is little showing the two painters’ sense of cultural, political, or
racial superiority over China and the Chinese in their portraits of Cixi. Moreover, in
both Carl and Vos’s commissioned paintings, the sitter Cixi attempted to more forcefully control her portraits by giving direct instructions on the artistic creation and showing her best side to the painters during the production process. The interrelationships between the sitter and patron Cixi and the artists are subtle: Cixi was the royal patron who had absolute rights to instruct painters and dominate her own portraits; meanwhile, she needed to please her foreign portraitists since she realized that the painters’ perceptions would have something to do with her public image and reputation in the West. Especially in Carl’s portraits, the close contact and unique interactions between sitter and painter influenced how the painter represented the subject. Therefore, Cixi’s portraits are not only products of the clash between the Western and Eastern artistic traditions, but also the outcomes of the encounter and interactions between the Qing ruler and the West at a historically pivotal period when tensions and conflicts existed between Imperial China and the West. In particular, Carl’s portrait of Cixi that was sent to the St. Louis World’s Fair, better demonstrates the complex relationship between the China and the United States government. The next chapter will focus on this portrait and the St. Louis World’s Fair, and discuss its exhibition and its socio-historical significance.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI’S PORTRAIT AND THE ST. LOUIS WORLD’S FAIR

The most significant breakthrough that Katharine Carl and Hubert Vos’s portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi achieved was that they were, unprecedentedly, displayed outside of China, thereby giving the Western public an opportunity to view the Chinese ruler’s “sacred visage.” Moreover, after being officially exhibited at the St. Louis World’s Fair, one of Carl’s portraits of Cixi was presented to the United States Government by the Qing court as a diplomatic gift in 1905, and was housed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington DC.  

This portrait provides a particular lens for viewing the interrelationship between China and the West, as well as Americans’ attitudes toward the Empress Dowager. In this chapter, I lay out the different aspects surrounding this portrait and the St. Louis World’s Fair, including the historical context of the exhibition, the reasons why the portrait was sent to the Fair, and the intentions of the involved parties, and I examine how the relationship between China and the West, especially with the United States, were reflected through the exhibition of the portrait and the handover of its ownership. Throughout the process, various questions are raised: What were Cixi’s reasons for showing her portrait overseas and presenting it to the United States Government? Why did Sarah Conger initiate the idea of exhibiting the portrait of Cixi at the St. Louis Exposition? What message did the
organizers of the Exposition want to send through the display of this image? Finally, how did the Western public respond to this portrait?

In order to better explore these questions and understand the socio-historical significance of this portrait, the political and diplomatic relationship between China and the United States will be taken into account to establish a context for the painting’s exhibition, including the Boxer Rebellion, the Boxer Protocol signed between the Qing Government and the Western powers after the Eight Nation Alliance’s invasion into Beijing, one of the Unequal Treaties, and the Japan-Russia War. I argue that this likeness of the Qing ruler in fact played an active part in communication between the West and China, and was a particular outcome of the tricky interactions between the Chinese ruler and foreign parties at the turn of the twentieth century. The foreigners’ reception of this portrait also revealed the prevailing attitude toward Cixi in the West.

The Empress Dowager’s Choice

I will start from the Chinese ruler’s point of view to discuss the socio-historical significance of Katharine Carl’s portrait. The turn of the twentieth century saw an apparent shift in the Qing Empress Dowager’s attitude toward the West. Since the Opium War had forcefully initiated trade between China and the United Kingdom, Western imperialist powers more and more extensively enacted their expansion and exploitation on China’s soil. Throughout Cixi’s life, she had experienced dramatic conflicts between the Qing Empire and the West, for instance, the Second Opium War,
in which the British-French Allied Army invaded Beijing and burnt the Old Summer Palace (Yuanming Yuan) in 1860; and the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 that ended in the catastrophic defeat of the Beiyang Force—the elite troops of the Qing Dynasty, and utterly revealed the military incompetence of China. The frequent wars also brought about a series of humiliating “unequal treaties”. In addition, the Western powers did not like the conservative Empress Dowager, and constantly requested Cixi to return the throne to the legitimate and more reform-minded Guangxu emperor after she seized power. Thus, it is not difficult to understand why Cixi developed a deep anti-foreign sentiment.

Meanwhile, in response to the Western powers’ invasion, the Chinese public’s anti-foreign, anti-Christian sentiments and agitation also increased and finally culminated in the Boxer Rebellion, a folk movement led by the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists under the slogan “support the Qing, destroy the foreign.” The Boxer organizations first emerged in Shandong Province in 1898, and grew in strength in North China by 1900. At the beginning, Cixi intended to suppress the Boxers as she worried that the Rebellion would menace the Manchu’s reign. Later, Cixi realized the merit of the Boxers’ nationalistic sentiments and determined to take advantage of the Boxers’ armed forces to against Westerners. Thus, she announced the official support for the Boxer Rebellion in spite of the strong objections of the foreign diplomatic corps. In June 1900, the Boxers marched toward Beijing, destroying the railways, burning churches, and killing foreign missionaries, diplomats, and Chinese Christians along the
The Legation Quarter in Beijing was besieged and fiercely attacked by the Boxers. The fact that the Qing Government refused to dispatch troops to suppress the Rebellion and protect the Legation Quarter irritated the Western powers, who forged an Alliance to march toward Beijing. As a result of the culmination of hatred toward the West, Cixi declared war on the Eight Nation Alliance at the suggestion of conservative officials, and made use of the Boxers to withstand assault by foreign troops. However, the poorly equipped Chinese military force was not able to contend with the Allied Army, who easily encroached on Beijing and seized the Forbidden City. The result was that Cixi and the Guangxu emperor had to abandon the capital and flee to Xi’an. In order to assure the Manchu’s imperial reign over China and obtain temporary peace, Cixi ordered the Viceroy Li Hongzhang and Prince Gong Yixin to negotiate peace with the Alliance at all costs. One result of this war was that the Boxer Protocol was signed, in which the Alliance required a compensation of 450 million taels of silver (equivalent to sixty seven million sterling pounds) plus the interest over thirty years. In addition, the Boxers and many Qing provincial officials who supported the Rebellion were punished, and many harsh and humiliating clauses were imposed on China by the powers. Being completely powerless to make a stand against the foreign powers in war, the Qing government and Cixi had to ingratiate themselves to the West, and try to satisfy their various demands, including ceding territories and paying huge indemnities. The Alliance’s invasion and the Boxer Protocol shifted Cixi’s attitude toward foreigners.\textsuperscript{162}

The change in the political and diplomatic relationship between the Qing Empire
and the foreign powers also can be viewed in light of China’s participation in the World’s Fairs held in the West. In the second half of nineteenth century, the Great International Expositions became increasingly popular in Europe and the United States. They showed off the latest technological progress, displayed contemporary art works, and presented agricultural and industrial products from all over the world, as well as ethnographic exhibits from Western colonies. The International Expositions also served as a platform for rivalry between different nations. The Expositions also provided an opportunity for the colonial powers to show their cultural and technical superiority over their colonies by juxtaposing the native culture and the undeveloped technology of the colonies with the more advanced culture of the West.

China had officially participated in several International Expositions, including the Vienna Exposition in 1873, the Centennial Exhibitions of 1876 in Philadelphia, the Paris Expositions Universelles in 1889 and 1900, and so on. However, when the invitation to the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago was sent to China, the Qing government refused to delegate a commissioner or take any official part in the Fair, which reflects the specific animosity between China and the United States at that time. On the one hand, the anti-Chinese sentiment was high in America at the time, and the decades-long tension and the reciprocal antipathy between China and the United States undoubtedly had an important impact on the reaction of the Qing Government to the Chicago World’s Fair. On the other hand, China’s refusal to participate in the 1893 Chicago Exposition was a clear and direct response to the hostile Geary Act, which was
passed in 1892 and renewed several restrictions on Chinese immigrants of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Upon learning about the Act, the Qing government informed the United States government that China would break off its diplomatic and economic relationship with the US if the Act was implemented. As a continuation of the expression of China’s discontented attitude toward the Geary Act, China refused to participate the Chicago World’s Fair that was held in the year following the Act.163

In 1903, shortly after the event that marked a turning point in the interaction of the Qing ruler and the foreign powers, the United States government started to prepare the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis to celebrate the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase from France. This time, the Qing government not only positively responded to the invitation to participate but made its most ceremonious appearance of any international expositions up to that time. Previously, all Chinese exhibitions at the World’s Fairs were organized and funded by the Imperial Maritime Custom Service (IMCS), and the Chinese delegations were led by the foreign officials of the IMCS.164 According to the organizers of the St. Louis World’s Fair, “China’s representation at St. Louis in 1904 is on an entirely different basis [compared to China’s previous exhibitions at the International Expositions].”165 In 1902, Guangxu and Cixi gave audience to John Barrett, the St. Louis World’s Fair Commissioner General to Asia, Australia, and the Philippines, and announced that the Qing government would appoint an Imperial Commission to take responsibility for the Chinese exhibitions. In order to show the importance she placed on the St. Louis Exposition, the Empress Dowager Cixi
committed a specific appropriation of 750,000 taels (equivalent to 500,000 US Dollars) directly from the Imperial Treasury for China’s exhibits at the Fair. Prince Pulun was appointed as the Commissioner General of the Imperial Chinese Delegation, and he ordered an exact replica of the pavilion at his palace in Beijing for the pavilion at the Chinese Village in St. Louis. Cixi also provided some of her imperial collection, including paintings, calligraphies, and ceramics, for the Chinese exhibition. The Imperial vice-Commissioner Huang Kaijia became the first of the foreign commissioners who resided in St. Louis for inspecting construction of the Chinese Pavilion. The direct involvement and enthusiastic response of the Qing court became appealing elements of the Chinese exhibits and suggested the Qing government’s cooperative attitude toward the St. Louis World’s Fair.

As discussed in the last chapter, the fact that Cixi acceded to have her portrait painted by an American artist and to have it displayed at the St. Louis World’s Fair indicated the Qing ruler’s friendly gesture to the United States. Furthermore, along with the developments in the international situation, especially in the relationship between China and the United States, Katharine Carl’s portrait of Cixi played a timely and significant role as a diplomatic gift that was presented to the United States government by Cixi to express her goodwill to the American people and President Theodore Roosevelt. Almost coincident with the St. Louis Fair, the Japan-Russia War was declared in February 1904 as a culmination of conflicts between these two Imperialist powers for dominance over Manchuria and Korea. Standing on neither side of Japan
nor of Russia, China was obligated to give up the three Northeastern Provinces as the major battlefield. The conflagrations of war in Chinese territory extremely worried the Chinese ruler and with good reason, since China would ultimately lose its state sovereignty in the Northeast and therefore became the actual victim of the war.\textsuperscript{170}

However, the feeble Qing government could scarcely do anything to terminate the war on its own, but anchored its hopes on other foreign powers to bring the “peace.”

The other powers, including Britain, America, and Germany, did eventually intervene for they were concerned that their own vested or potential interests in the Far East would be affected by the war. Unwilling to see Russia’s excessive expansion in Manchuria and in order to balance the power of the Japanese and Russia Empires in East Asia, the American President Theodore Roosevelt played a role as mediator between Russia and Japan.\textsuperscript{171} In January 1905, the United States government’s proposal that the powers should guarantee not to carve up China at the end of the war and to return Manchuria to China was supported by Britain, France, and Italy. Objectively, the proposal protected China’s interest and kept its territorial integrity.

Under these political circumstances, there was no doubt that Cixi would deeply appreciate and spare no efforts to fawn on the United States government. As a result, her likeness, painted by an American artist and displayed in America, spontaneously became the most appropriate vehicle to express the Qing ruler’s goodwill, friendliness, and appreciation toward the United States government. In February 1905, on behalf of Her Majesty, China’s Minister to the United States, Liang Cheng, presented the oil
portrait of Cixi that had been displayed at the St. Louis World’s Fair to President Roosevelt as a diplomatic gift of the Imperial Government of China. At the presentation ceremony, Liang stated that the St. Louis World’s Fair gave Cixi a chance to show “her appreciation of this friendship [between the United States and China]” and the portrait of Cixi became “a memorial of her abiding interest in the welfare and prosperity of the American people.”172 The American press directly linked the presentation of Cixi’s portrait with America’s involvement in the Japan-Russia War, pointing out that it was “made as a token of the good will of China for the United States and in some recognition of the part this country has played in the preservation thus far of the integrity of the Chinese Empire.”173

The diplomatic significance of Katharine Carl’s portrait of Cixi was reflected through its production and exhibition and delivered an obvious signal of Cixi’s amicableness to the United States. Moreover, Cixi turned her likeness into a political tool to carry out her diplomatic strategy. Due to its exhibition and presentation, the notion and symbolism of Chinese rulers’ portraits changed. First, with regard to exhibition, when Cixi’s portrait was officially and publicly displayed in the West, the sacred and ritual quality that conventional Chinese rulers’ portraits possessed was considerably weakened. In portraiture theory, a portrait of an individual is a “substitute” or “proxy” for the sitter in nature and in general. That is, a ruler’s portrait was not only a representation of the ruler’s likeness, but also “was” the real ruler.174 Therefore, when Cixi’s portrait was viewed by a Chinese audience, who were her subjects, it would draw
the viewer’s attention to the sitter’s paramount power and authority, and evoke his or her feelings of awe. It would feel as if the powerful Empress Dowager Cixi was in the presence of the viewer. This also explains why Cixi would hold a simple ceremony to have her portrait viewed by officials and royal members, why her portrait had to be placed only upright during the long-distance transportation from China to the United States, and why Prince Pulun needed to conduct a receiving ceremony for the portrait when it arrived at St. Louis. To the Chinese, this image represented the Empress Dowager herself and they had to show reverence to it. However, when this portrait was displayed in a completely foreign environment, the metaphor of the Chinese ruler’s image became much less sacred or ritualistic. The foreign audience’s reception of this portrait would vary depending on their different levels of knowledge, viewpoints, perceptions of China and its ruler, and so on. The foreign beholders more likely gazed at Cixi’s portrait with curiosity, rather than with reverence or awe. To outsiders of China, this Chinese imperial portrait might simply mean a work of art, the Oriental exoticism, or the visual representation of a cruel Empress whom they read or learned about from literature and newspapers. (I will discuss what this image meant to different foreigners more fully later in this chapter.)

Moreover, the presentation of Cixi’s portrait marked a further departure from Chinese convention. Since the seventeenth century, the European monarchs’ portraits had been presented to the Qing emperors by foreign envoys as diplomatic gifts. For example, the Portuguese envoys presented the portrait of King Afonso VI (reigned
1656-83) to the Kangxi emperor. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, Cixi received portraits of Queen Victoria and the Russian Czar Nicholas II (reigned 1894-1917) and placed them in her living room in the Summer Palace. However, early Chinese rulers seldom returned the same courtesy to foreigners. To date there has been little research to suggest that Chinese ruler’s portraits had been officially sent overseas as diplomatic gifts before the time of Cixi. At a pivotal moment in China’s political history, Cixi conformed to the Western diplomatic etiquette to please the foreigners without any hesitation about breaking with the Chinese tradition. She presented a “proxy” of herself—her portrait to fully express the appreciation and friendliness to the United States government and its head.

Another motive for Cixi to display her likeness at the St. Louis World’s Fair might have been to reestablish her reputation in the West. After the Boxer Rebellion, Cixi was fully aware of the fact that her reputation had become very negative in Westerners’ eyes. At the same time, Cixi had a firm confidence in herself, and once said to Deling, “I am the cleverest woman that lived and others cannot compare with me. Although I have heard much about Queen Victoria…I don’t think her life was half so interesting and eventful as mine. I have four hundred million people, all depend on my judgment.” Interestingly, along with Cixi’s portrait, several portraits of Queen Victoria, including a statue and a print, and paintings representing her funeral were also on display in the Art Palace of the St. Louis World’s Fair. Queen Victoria’s reign was almost contemporaneous with that of Cixi, nevertheless, these two female rulers’
reputations were very different in the West. Queen Victoria was deemed a beloved “mother of the nation” and a cultural icon, and her name was closely associated with domestic harmony, high moral standards, and female virtues. By contrast, Cixi was depicted as a licentious and rapacious autocrat. After a series of political crises that vastly jeopardized her throne, such as the Hundred Days’ Reform and the invasion of the Eight Nation Alliance, Cixi might have felt that it was necessary to reassert her political status and the Manchu’s rule not only to the Chinese, but also to the world. By means of openly displaying her grandiose portrait on the international stage provided by the World’s Fair, Cixi skillfully flaunted her female charm, intelligence, and unquestionable authority to a wider international audience. The portrait of Cixi played a dual role as a diplomatic tool and effective medium to advertise herself.

Sarah Conger and the Exhibition of Cixi’s Portrait at the Exposition

America had its own intentions behind the drive to display the Chinese Empress Dowager’s portrait at the St. Louis World’s Fair. The fact that Cixi was not a popular and respected woman in the eyes of contemporary foreigners can be seen through the numerous hostile articles found in the Western mainstream press, such as the London Times and the New York Times, and the English-language newspapers that circulated in China such as the North China Daily News and its weekly version the North China Herald. So, why would America still wish to exhibit this “wicked” Chinese ruler’s portrait at the St. Louis World’s Fair? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to
begin with the intentions of Sarah Conger, who put forward the proposal of having Cixi’s portrait painted by Katharine Carl and exhibited at the Fair. Accompanying her husband Edwin Hurd Conger, Sarah Conger had arrived in China in 1898 and stayed there for eight years. During her sojourn in China, she experienced the dramatic conflicts between China and the West, such as the Boxer Rebellion, the Beijing Siege, and the intrusion of the Allied troops. She also obtained access to China’s Empress Dowager on many occasions through Cixi’s tea parties and audiences, and was favorably regarded by Cixi for her mild manner. 182

Conger took full advantage of these informal diplomatic occasions to exert her influence on the Chinese ruler. 183 First of all, her suggestion of the portrait project was befitting her social role as an envoy’s wife, and was out of consideration for American diplomatic strategy. Not only to Conger, but also to the American Legation in China, the diplomatic importance of exhibiting the portrait of Cixi at the St. Louis World’s Fair was as significant as it was to China. In the contest of the Imperialist powers for their expansionist ambitions, including possessions of concessions, mining rights, and spheres of influence in China, the United States was not a big winner, and obtained less benefit from China than its competitors, such as Britain, Russia, and Germany. 184 However, China’s cooperative reaction to the St. Louis World’s Fair and the fact that its ruler unprecedentedly presented her “sacred likeness” at the Fair fully demonstrated America’s diplomatic victory in China over other powers. From the beginning, the news reports of the portrait had appeared in the most influential American newspapers, such
as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, suggesting the close attention the American society paid to it.\textsuperscript{185} After the St. Louis World’s Fair, a short complimentary account of the painting was published in the *New York Times*, which wrote, “When Miss Carl painted the Empress Dowager of China and the Embassy of the United States took all the honors, the other legationists turned through envy and jealousy the color of jade and saffron.”\textsuperscript{186} This is indicative of the American mainstream media’s acknowledgment of the remarkable achievement of the American diplomatic corps in China. By bringing about such a historical breakthrough, Conger successfully fulfilled her mission on the diplomatic “battlefield.”

Second, Conger’s idea of exhibiting Cixi’s image at the St. Louis Exposition could be largely attributed to her feminine vantage point. In the West, there was a clear gender distinction in attitudes toward Cixi in the early twentieth century. A number of publications by foreign ladies, including Ethel MacDonald, Sarah Conger, and Katharine Carl, generally offered a far more positive image of Cixi than that represented by male journalists and envoys.\textsuperscript{187} For example, Mrs. MacDonald also wrote about her impression of the Chinese Empress Dowager after attending Cixi’s first tea party in 1898: “I should say the Dowager Empress was a woman of some strength of character, certainly genial and kindly. This is the opinion of all the ladies who accompanied me.”\textsuperscript{188} In contrast, the British journalists in Shanghai described Cixi as “ignorant, timid, self-willed, avaricious, and sanguinary,” a viewpoint restated by John Foord, the *New York Times* editor and writer on Far Eastern and economic issues, in his article.\textsuperscript{189}
(I will consider the negative male responses to Cixi more fully later in this chapter.)

Also, the British journalists Bland and Morrison tartly satirized the foreign ladies’ social gatherings with Cixi through tea parties, and called Conger the “simple-minded wife of the American Minister.”

During her seven years in China, Conger developed a personal admiration for Cixi and a neutral, even sympathetic, feeling for China and the Chinese, differing from the prevailing anti-Chinese sentiment in America. Countering the stereotyped portrayal of Cixi as an evil and “odious woman” and the fabricated narratives about her in the West, Conger appraised the Empress Dowager of the Qing Empire as “a great woman, with no traces of cruelty.” From a feminine angle, Conger specifically sympathized with the difficulties and prejudice that a female ruler would confront, as she noted, “The many conversations awarded me with Her Majesty revealed much of the concealed force and value of China's women. Ignorance of these qualities has brought a pronounced misrepresentation of China's womanhood.”

Being “indignant over the horrible, unjust caricatures of Her Imperial Majesty in illustrated papers,” and desirous that “the world might see her more as she really is,” Conger conceived and proposed the idea of having Cixi’s portrait painted and exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition “with intense love for womankind, and in justice to this Imperial woman.” She sought to take advantage of the exhibition to amend the Westerners’ misperception of China’s Empress Dowager and to have the public rediscover Cixi. In a letter to her daughter, Conger stated:
This portrait may present to the outside world even a little of the true expression and character of this misrepresented woman [Cixi], is my most earnest wish... I have most earnestly wished that our home people could see Her Majesty I have many times seen her. I well know that these departures are testing, but I always feel that the Empress Dowager can meet them successfully.  

At this point, Conger’s suggestion was not only useful for American diplomacy, but was also well-intentioned toward the Chinese Empress Dowager. Her position as the ambassador’s wife and her feminine viewpoint propelled Conger to initiate this unprecedented event.

The St. Louis World’s Fair Organizers’ Perception of Cixi’s Portrait

In the meantime, the organizers of the St. Louis Exposition certainly had a different angle of view regarding Cixi’s portrait and its exhibition. First of all, the Manchu ruler’s portrait undoubtedly added to the exotic attraction of the Fair and satisfied Westerners’ fancy about the Chinese Empress Dowager. The splendid Manchu finery and the opulent furnishings of the Qing Palace that are depicted in Carl’s painting stood at the highest level of the Qing material culture and epitomized the exoticism of the Oriental culture and myth.  

Moreover, as one of the most powerful women in the world at the time, the Empress Dowager of the Qing Empire, seemed to Westerners to have been enveloped in a shroud of mystery from the time she entered the political arena, and she had been extensively portrayed in various writings outside China. As mentioned in the last chapter, many Western writings about Cixi contain exotic elements, and she actually served as a “stereotype” for the “unknown” and “mysterious” Far East. A
fictional novel about Cixi was published as early as 1898, whose author was American journalist Kathleen Gray Nelson. Never travelling to China and unaware of Cixi’s real name and origin, Nelson mixed up Empress Dowager Cixi and her co-regent Ci’an’s (also spelled Tzu-an) honorific title and therefore called her heroine Cixi Tuen. This book is entirely a Western fantasy about Cixi’s life and removed from reality. It depicts Cixi as a slave girl who was sold by her father to a viceroy. Presented to the Emperor by the viceroy, Cixi eventually became the Empress Dowager and reigned over China. This novel also romantically linked the Chinese Empress Dowager with Christianity: a foreigner befriended the slave girl Tuen and introduced her to Christian doctrine. In the end, the Empress Dowager received a New Testament as one of her sixtieth birthday gifts.\(^{198}\) The illustrations contained in this book are also exoticized depictions of China and the Chinese.

In addition, comments, news reports, and sketches of her life could be easily found in contemporary Western newspapers and magazines. These writings, which were concerned not only with her political career, but also her private life and romances, fully reflect foreigners’ fantasies about Cixi and her life. In 1898, a rumor that the Empress Dowager would remarry the Viceroy Li Hongzhang was widely spread in the West and Japan.\(^{199}\) Some anecdotes also contain erotic content, which may have further excited the Western public’s voyeurism. For instance, in his articles in newspapers and letters to foreign diplomats written in exile, Kang Youwei invented the story that Cixi’s chief eunuch Li Lianying actually was one of her lovers, rather than a real eunuch.\(^{200}\) As a
result, Cixi’s portrait would become a strong attraction to fairgoers and satisfy their curiosity to see the “real face” of the Chinese Empress Dowager, who previously only existed in their imagination.

The way in which the portrait of Cixi was presented at the Fair moreover reveals more important information about how the directors of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition perceived the Chinese ruler’s “sacred image.” China was presented at the St. Louis World’s Fair by a comprehensive assemblage of Chinese art and handicrafts in the Palace of Liberal Art, a small exhibition on the Chinese educational system in the Palace of Education, as well as the ethnographic Chinese Village on the Pike. Under normal circumstances, the portrait of Cixi should have been displayed in the Chinese exhibition rooms because it belonged to the Chinese imperial collection. However, the painting was separated from any other Chinese objects, and exhibited in the Gallery of American Art that occupied the most prominent location in the Art Palace—the entire central pavilion (figure 20). Such an arrangement suggests that the directors of the Art Department wished to view and promote the Chinese ruler’s likeness as an American artistic achievement, rather than as a Chinese object. The idea that an artist’s reputation could be enhanced by serving at court or attaining royal commissions has been universally accepted. To Americans, the fact Carl had won the commission of painting the portrait of the Chinese Empress Dowager unquestionably manifested the American artist’s international fame.

At the St. Louis World’s Fair, China and Chinese art were not well-received or
well-treated.\textsuperscript{203} In contrast to Japan, which was deemed as “one of the first nations of the world” at the St. Louis World’s Fair because of its rapid military expansion and economic rise,\textsuperscript{204} and whose national art works occupied the spacious area in the Palace of Fine Arts, China was not considered a civilized and modernized nation. Chinese art, not thought of as “high art” by the Fair organizers, was reclassified from “fine art” to “applied art” and moved to the Palace of Liberal Arts, differing from the initial proposal.\textsuperscript{205} The art exhibitions occupied a very important place at the St. Louis World’s Fair, so that the Fair president David R. Francis regarded the buildings on Art Hill as the “apex, physically and ethically, of the Exposition.”\textsuperscript{206} In her article, Carol Ann Christ has pointed out that the art exhibit was “both a product and a producer of nationalist ideology.”\textsuperscript{207} However, other than Carl’s portrait of Cixi, none of the Chinese art works, including hand scrolls, jade, porcelains and so on, were afforded a place in the Palace of Art which was designed for permanent use (now the St. Louis Art Museum) and was reserved only for “high art.”\textsuperscript{208} On the other hand, the portrait of Cixi was exhibited in the Fine Art Hall because in the eyes of the directors of the Art Department, the representation of the Chinese ruler’s “sacred face” served the ideological function as a good example of American national artistic accomplishment; as the official catalogue noted, “The exhibit of paintings in the United States Section demonstrates again the fact…that we have a distinctive national art.”\textsuperscript{209}

Another important message that the St. Louis World’s Fair organizers attempted to convey through Cixi’s portrait is also associated with the female role. Women played an
active and crucial role at the St. Louis Exposition. The Fair’s Board of Lady Managers consisted of twenty-three women was officially established, and worked under the authority of the US government. The Board of Lady Managers undertook many important duties, including serving as jurors on all committees to award exhibits produced and involved by women. Accordingly, promoting women’s contributions in all areas became an important goal of the St. Louis World’s Fair. In this context, Carl’s portrait of the Chinese Empress Dowager demonstrated American women artists’ achievements. At the final report of the Exposition, a juror, Mary B. Temple, wrote “Glancing at the portrait painting of Cecelia Beaux, the work of Kate Carr [Carl]… we feel, as well as see, the exalted place woman's genius has given her in the art world of today.”

Reactions to the Qing Empress Dowager’s Image in the West

Although the event of a Qing ruler’s portrait being painted by an American and displayed at an American International Exposition might be thought of as an important American moment, there is very little first-hand detailed information on fairgoers’ and general audiences’ direct impression of Cixi’s portrait at the St. Louis World’s Fair, which suggests that the portrait of the Qing Empress Dowager itself probably did not receive special attention from fairgoers. One of the factors that caused this phenomenon might have been that the Fair organizers failed to mention and to actively advertise this painting in the Official Guide. The only direct statement about the reception of this
image I have found in the American press is a plain description of Cixi’s appearance and costume, which seems to reflect Western curiosity with, and fascination for, Chinese exoticism. Published in the *Advance* magazine in December 1904, the description reads as follows:

She is a picture of vigor, with piercing black eyes, hair dyed jet black, and little hands, whose nails, several inches long, are protected by golden shields like elongated thimbles. She is very vain of these hands, which, according to Chinese notions, are beautiful, and she is equally proud of her long hair, which she parts in front and brushes over her ears Manchu fashion. At the back it is held by a long jade pin, like a paper-cutter, tasseled in crimson and decorated with artificial flowers and golden butterflies.214

It seems that Americans cared more about the message that was conveyed through the production and exhibition of the painting than the portrait itself. Several articles in popular publications concerning the painting give a general picture of Americans’ reaction. Like the organizers of the St. Louis World’s Fair, the American public also liked the fact that the Qing Empress Dowager’s portrait was painted by an American artist, as Walter Williams writes in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*: “The portrait of the Dowager Empress An [Cixi], painted by an American woman… is shown as a special mark of favor to the United States.”215 The story of an American woman painter entering the Chinese imperial palace and painting the Manchu Empress Dowager created a stir in the United States at the time. Around the time of the St. Louis Fair, many writings regarding Carl’s portrait of Cixi consistently stressed one point: Katharine Carl was the first American who was able to penetrate Chinese Imperial seclusion to paint its ruler, and she enjoyed numerous privileges in the Qing Court.216 A
short article exaggerated Carl’s experience at the Palace in China and falsely elevated the artist’s status at the Qing Court by conjecturing that Carl was “waited upon hand and foot. The highest officials in the palace are forced to kow-tow to this venturesome lady, and she takes precedence of the late Chinese Ambassador to France [Yu Geng] and his family.”

Carl was promoted as a “venturesome” heroine, and a female explorer like Marco Polo. Moreover, one article in the Chicago Tribune even viewed the fact that Cixi employed an American artist to paint her portrait as one of the signs that Cixi was “Americanizing” China. The way in which the American press received and publicized the portrait of Cixi not only suggested the American public’s fascination with the exotic and mysterious Chinese culture, but also mirrored their self-importance and nationalistic pride since American press accounts and viewer reactions were inclined to accentuate the point that the portrait showed American superiority over China and America’s power of influence over the Qing Empire and its ruler.

In addition to direct feedback about Cixi’s portrait, the artist’s memoir, With the Empress Dowager, provides more information on Westerners’ response to Cixi’s image. Carl’s memoir was serialized in The Century Illustrated Weekly Magazine and published as a book simultaneously in 1905, and then reprinted in 1906. According to Carl, upon her return to the United States, she heard of a variety of hearsays that delineated Cixi standing over the artist “in threatening attitudes,” and compelling Carl “to represent her [Cixi] as a young and beautiful woman!” The statements that “She [Cixi] has the soul of a tigress in the body of a woman,” and Cixi was a “shrewd and tempestuous” old
lady were first published in the London *Times*, and then were copied in the American press, such as the *Chicago Tribune*. More harmfully, all these words were spoken under the guise of Carl, thus appearing more convincing to the public, although, Carl said she never made any such statements. Being discontented with the rumors, Carl decided to publicize her experience at the Chinese court to clarify these false statements about the Empress Dowager.

Carl’s statement reveals that the flattering image of Cixi as a very graceful and benign lady did not meet the expectation of contemporary foreigners, and specifically, Cixi’s opponents; as a result, they took for granted or tended to believe that the poor artist was forced to flatter the dreadful and rude sitter. Compared to her visual depiction, Carl’s literal portrayal of Cixi received blunter criticism. Her book, which describes Cixi as an intellectual, attractive, and progressive female ruler, was criticized as “too rose-colored… [the Empress] is a very different person from the popular conception of Tze Hsi [Cixi] the Bloodthirsty, the Cruel,” and “excessive in praise, while blind to the wart or to wrinkles.” A review published in the *New York Times* also said, “The part relating to the Empress, like the portrait, is without perspective…one gets occasional sights of comparatively unvarnished facts…however much we should have like a more balanced judgment on the ruler of China and her Court.” Carl’s visually and verbally laudatory depictions of Cixi that represented the Empress Dowager as an intellectual, elegant, and dignified lady with motherly amiability was not considered objective by Western audiences. The Western press’s reaction to Cixi’s image and
events surrounding it reveal foreigners’ prevailingly adverse sentiments toward the Manchu Empress Dowager. The portrait could hardly change Westerners’ deep-rooted hostile feeling about Cixi or eliminate the misunderstandings about her. It even induced a new round of severe attacks on Cixi, because it became a fresh subject that could be willfully interpreted and fabricated to defame China’s female ruler by Cixi’s opponents. Conger’s kind wish that the Western world would modify its negative perception of Cixi by seeing her true likeness unfortunately fell flat.

It should be noted that Americans held a negative view of Chinese in general and Chinese American were often portrayed as “Chinese vices” in newspapers at the time. In the St. Louis, the Chinese exhibited objects, including fine arts, were disorderly organized, “scattered throughout the fairgrounds,” so that some fairgoers regarded Chinese fine art exhibit as “topsy-turvydom” and perceived “backwardness” in it. Some Chinese anthropological exhibits further implied that China was an untamed and decaying nation, for example, the women with bound feet and opium pipes were presented at the Fair. China’s presence at the St. Louis World’s Fair did not change the American public’s perceptions of China, which was still deemed backward and unenlightened. Chinese exhibitions set off the Western progress, civilization, and modernization, and were used to educate American fairgoers. Likewise, the portrait of the Chinese ruler ultimately did little to improve Cixi’s reputation. When a nation was considered lagging, feeble, and uncivilized, her ruler hardly won the Westerner’s respect and acknowledgment. Therefore, American public chose to question the literally
and visually positive image of Cixi offered by Carl it, rather than believe it. In addition, the various negative depictions about the Chinese Empress Dowager that can be found in the popular press of the time played a powerful role in shaping the Western public reception of Cixi’s image at the turn of the twentieth century.

How the Western Press Shaped the Reception of Cixi’s Image in the West

The foreigners’ reception of Cixi’s image delineated by Carl was strongly impacted by the preexisting and stereotyped portrayal of Cixi that appeared in the Western media. Before Cixi’s portrait was officially unveiled at the St. Louis Exposition, a large number of contemporary Westerners had become familiar with this Manchu ruler through various portrayals appearing in the Western mainstream media. Basically, the image of Cixi that was disseminated through the media was overwhelmingly uncomplimentary and negative. In a satiric book *China the Long-Lived Empire*, written by the American writer and photographer Eliza Ruhama Scidmore and published in March 1900, Cixi was denounced as a “despotic ruler” and accused of “petticoat tyranny.” Occasional praise would incur more dramatic criticism. For instance, when Charles Denby (1861-1938), who served as the American Minister to China from 1885 to 1898, observed that Cixi was “one of the great women of the world” and called her “the compeer of Catherine, Elizabeth, and Victoria,” the British people, who regarded the comparison between Cixi and Victoria as an insult to their Queen, lashed out at Denby’s words as “such an inexcusably impudent statement.” In response to this debate, one
brief biographical account of Cixi, which was published in the *New York Times* during the Boxer Rebellion, characterized Cixi as “ignorant, timid, self-willed, avaricious, and sanguinary,” placing the Qing Empress Dowager on a par with the Roman Empress Messalina, who was notorious for her sexual promiscuity.236

Another important figure who contributed to the unflattering depiction of Cixi in the West was Kang Youwei, one of the principle leaders of the Hundred Day’s Reform. After the defeat of the reform, Kang was exiled by the Qing court, and at the same time highly praised as a “hero” of China’s progress toward modernization by Western journalists. A radical counter to Cixi, Kang did his utmost to inveigh against this female ruler by writing articles in the anti-Manchu press and letters to foreign diplomats in China. Many of Kang’s descriptions of Cixi, including his accusations that she imprisoned and poisoned the Guangxu emperor, and that she was an uninformed woman who indulged in licentious activities, were quoted by foreign journalists and republished in the Western press. Therefore, his statements that intentionally aimed at defiling Cixi had a great effect in the West.237

After the Boxer Rising of 1900, Cixi’s reputation became much worse in the West. She was relentlessly accused as the plotter of the Boxer Riot and the Beijing Siege by Morrison. In the *Times* on 13 October 1900, Morrison wrote:

One of the ancient sages of China foretold that ‘China will be destroyed by a woman.’ The prophecy is approaching fulfillment. When the Empress Dowager, in September 1898, seized once more the reins of power, who could have foreseen that she was to lead her country with such swiftness to destruction? The anti-foreign, anti-Christian movement which has now culminated in the occupation
of Peking by the allied Powers…was from the outset encouraged and fostered by
the Empress-Dowager and by the ignorant reactionaries whom she selected as her
advisers.\textsuperscript{238}

In the continuation of the October 13 \textit{Times} article, Morrison more directly blamed
Cixi for the riots and siege, stating “the truth is that the attacks upon the Legations were
ordered by the Dowager Empress and organized by Yung Lu, Thung-fuh-siang, and Li
Ping Heng, high Government officials who were appointed by Imperial decree to reduce
the Legations by fire, sword, or famine.”\textsuperscript{239} Morrison’s statements were immediately
accepted and picked up by American newspapers, for example, the \textit{New York Times}
article cited Morrison and reported that “She [Cixi] seized upon Boxer movement…as a
means of diverting popular wrath from herself to the foreigners.”\textsuperscript{240}

Paralleling these harsh viewpoints, various visual representations of Cixi that
lampooned the Qing ruler emerged in the form of popular prints, such as the cartoons
shown in figures 21, 22, and 23. All these caricatures of Cixi were published during the
Boxer Rebellion and acrimoniously satirized Cixi’s behavior during the riot. The
German postcard (figure 21) depicted the old Empress Dowager sitting behind the
Beijing City gate, besieged by the Eight Nation Allies gathering in front of the gate.\textsuperscript{241}
The inscription “Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt ahnt was wir leiden (Who knows
yearning only knows about our suffering),” drawn from a verse by the eminent German
writer Goethe, fully expressed foreigners’ vindictive feelings about the Beijing Siege.
Similarly, the cartoon in the British humor magazine \textit{Punch} (figure 22) represented the
scene as Cixi and her court fled Beijing in disorder after the allied army encroached the
Qing capital, and gloated over her discomfiture and the Qing Government’s incapability.

In the cover illustration of *Le Rire*, the famous French satirical magazine (figure 23), Cixi is shown sitting in front of a gallows impaled with bodies and holding a sharp blood-soaked dagger, an immediate reference to her ruthlessness as an “executioner” who should take responsibility for foreigners’ death in the Boxer Riot. The bright-colored costume, painted fan in her right hand, and exaggerated pearl necklace and cap ornaments emphasize her extremely extravagant life, and contrast with the horrifying scene in the background and the knife. The open-mouthed dragon painted on her robe, her vampire-like protruding tooth, and witchlike finger and nails protector, together create a stereotypical image of dragon lady.

These visual portrayals of Cixi published in the Western popular press shaped and reinforced the Western public’s hostile attitude toward the Qing Empress Dowager, and therefore also influenced the reception of Cixi’s image at the turn of the century. Universally, an aggressive and tough female ruler would face more poignant criticism and biased judgment than a man. Especially when the ruler acted against Westerners’ wishes and played hardball, the stereotyped image of her as a dragon lady was hardly challenged in foreigners’ minds.
Figure 20. Central Structure, the Art Palace, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition at St. Louis, 1904. Reproduced from F. J. V Skiff and Halsey C Ives, *Official Catalogue of Exhibitors: Universal Exposition, St. Louis, U.S. A.1904, Department of Art.* (St. Louis: Official Catalogue Company, 1904), p. 10.
Figure 21. Postcard *The War with China*, sent from Weissenkirchen to Wolfsburg in Carinthia, signed on Sep. 30, 1900, Lithograph, German.
Figure 22. Tenniel John, *In the Movement* (Oom, Paul, [to himself]. “Shifting Her Capital? My Idea!”). Illustration in *Punch*, August 29, 1900.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

All the portraits of Empress Dowager Cixi, including photographs and oil paintings discussed in this thesis were executed in media unconventional to the Chinese formal imperial portraits. They did not served as altar pieces and were not confined to imperial audiences; rather, they entered the public sphere to serve more functions than traditionally painted likenesses of Chinese monarchs. The notion of the imperial likeness was thus expanded. Cooperating with the photographer, Cixi deliberately exploited her dignified photographic portrait to proclaim her political authority and establish her personal identity. She also intended to shape public opinion through her image by fashioning herself as a powerful and merciful Buddhist deity in the staged photographs. Owing to mechanical reproduction, the photographic portraits of Cixi might not emanate the “aura” that traditional ruler’s portraits had, since they were multiples. However, they served a more clear and direct political function than the early Chinese rulers’ portraits, because the reproductive possibilities of photography enabled Cixi to disseminate her portraits and to affirm and consolidate her rule over China within a broader social spectrum and therefore. The power of the ruler’s portrait in propagandizing authority of the sovereign and throne was strengthened through the dissemination of images.
Carl and Vos’s oil portraits not only exemplify the fusion of Chinese and Western artistic traditions and vocabulary, but were also the outcome of the close encounter of the Chinese ruler and Western artists. Various factors influenced the artists’ perceptions and interpretations of the Qing female ruler, among which the unique interactions between portraitist Carl and her sitter and patron Cixi had a direct impact on Carl’s portrait images. Cixi tried to control her portraits by giving direct instructions and showing her best side and friendly attitude to the painter during the making of the portraits.

In particular, Carl’s portrait of Cixi exhibited at the St. Louis World’s Fair further represented the complex political and diplomatic interactions between China and the West, and revealed different perceptions by foreigners of the Chinese female ruler during a pivotal historical period when the Qing Dynasty was drawing to an end. This thesis has explored the purposes of the main parties involved in the public exhibition of Cixi’s portrait at the Fair. Considering its genesis, exhibition, and presentation, Carl’s portrait of Cixi is understood to be diplomatic and political in nature. It played a crucial role in the changing relationship between Cixi and her government and the United States government, and its ideological and political significance was important. The portrait was a reflection of the Qing government’s obedience to the United States, and to foreign powers in general. The rivalry among foreign powers in China brought about the temporarily friendly relations and cooperation between the United States and China, and then helped to materialize the exhibition and the handing over of Cixi’s “sacred visage.”
For the Chinese government and its ruler Cixi, this portrait served as a vehicle to convey “goodwill” toward the United States government; Americans, meanwhile, saw its exhibition at an American World’s Fair as indicative of their diplomatic victory over China and of American artistic achievement. Upon its public exhibition and presentation in the West, the sacred symbolism of the Chinese ruler’s likeness changed. The representation of the Chinese imperial face would not serve as a ritual object and was unlikely to evoke feelings of awe in the Western audience, who might have faced Cixi’s portrait with curious or suspicious gaze, or with nationalistic pride.

More importantly, the Western public’s response to Cixi’s portraits reflected foreigners’ prevailing attitudes toward the Qing ruler. The portrait and its exhibition at the Fair did not successfully improve or rescue Cixi’s public image in the West, unlike Cixi and Conger wished or were intended to do. A forceful female ruler of a country that was prevailingly deemed and presented as decaying and uncivilized, Cixi failed to obtain more complimentary comments from American public by means of displaying her portrait. The foreign audience’s reception of this portrait would be shaped or influenced by a variety of elements, among which the visually and verbally negative portrayals of the Chinese Empress Dowager in the Western popular press at the time was a key factor. Thus, the Qing ruler’s likeness plays an important role in exemplifying the complex relationship between China and the West and in illustrating Westerners’ perceptions of Cixi at turn of the twentieth century.
NOTES

1 The Eight-Banner system is the Manchu social, political and military system, and the Eight Banners refer to the eight administrative organizations in which the Manchu people were divided and managed, including Plain and Bordered Yellow Banners, Plain and Bordered White Banners, Plain and Bordered Red Banners, and Plain and Bordered Blue Banners. For Cixi’s biography, see Sterling Seagrave, Dragon Lady: The Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).


4 The Hundred Day’s Reform was under the leadership of the Emperor Guangxu and his supporters Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei. The reformers took a series of actions, aiming at transforming China into a modernized nation. Unfortunately, the Reform, lasting only from 11 June to 21 September 1898, was obstructed by the Coup of 1898 (also called Wuxu zhengbian) led by the Empress Dowager Cixi and the Conservatives. For the fight for power at the Qing court, see Zhu Chengru, Zhongguo huangdi zhidu, 348-77, and Wang Shuqing, “Qingdai de huangquan douzheng,” 71-73.

5 See Zhu Chengru, Zhongguo huangdi zhidu, 730-32; see also, Seagrave, Dragon Lady, 341-403.

6 For example, one of Palace Museum’s exhibitions “Empress Dowager Cixi’s Life in the Inner Court of the Qing Palace” points out that Cixi’s photographs are good source to survey court life, dress, and related historical figures. See http://www.dpm.org.cn/www_oldweb/China/E/E39/E39h.htm#no1.

8 West, *Portraiture*, 43-70.


15 Virginia Anderson presented an essay “A Semi-Chinese Picture: The Encounter of American Painter Huber Vos and the Empress Dowager of China” at a symposium “A Long and Turbulent Relationship: East-West Interchanges in American Art” held by the Smithsonian American Art Museum in October 2009. Unfortunately, I have not had an access to this paper so far, except for an abstract of it posted on the Smithsonian official website. For a catalogue entry on Vos’s portrait of Cixi that was executed in America, see Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., Kimberly Orcutt, and Virginia Anderson, ed., *American Paintings at Harvard: Volume Two, Paintings, Drawings, Pastels and Stained Glass by Artists Born 1826-1856* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 386-87.


17 It is said that the Guangxu emperor commissioned a photograph of himself and
his favorite consort Zhenfei before 1900. See Stuart and Rawski, *Worshiping the Ancestors*, 167. But only a photographic portrait of Zhenfei exists today and its exact dating and photographer is unknown.

18 For the history of early Chinese photography, see Regine Thiriez, *Barbarian Lens: Western Photographers of the Qianlong Emperor’s European Palaces* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1998), 3-16.


20 Thiriez, *Barbarian Lens*, 3.


22 For the first encounter between photography and the Qing imperial members, see, Thiriez, *Barbarian Lens*, 3.

23 Lin, “Cixi sheying shihua,” 82.

24 Liang Shitai launched a studio to take commercial portraiture in Tianjin around 1875. He also took two portraits for Prince Chun Yihuan, who greatly appreciated his photographic works. Lai Xingke (来兴克) was the photographer’s Chinese name, at the time of writing this paper, I cannot find his actual name.

25 For the detailed history of how photography was introduced into the imperial circle, see Lin, *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian*, 5-8.

Yihuan’s original words “以照相为准,” which literally mean “use individuals’ photographs as standard,” were somewhat ambiguous. See Lin, *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian*, 8. I assume here it means the portrait should be executed based on the sitter’s photographs. Another possible meaning is these painted portraits should have the same realistic effect as photographs do. During the late Qing period, many foreign photographers had already taken pictures or portraits of Chinese officials. For example, the British photographer John Thomson made numerous photos of well-known and influential political figures, such as Wu Tingfang, the Prince Yixin, and Shen Guifen. Although it has not been known if this project proceeded successfully, I assume that these officials’ photographs could be available.


27 Yu Rongling, *Qinggong suoji* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1957), 34, and Princess Derling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City* (New York: Moffat, Yard and
Company, 1929), 216. In her books published in English, Yu Deling called herself Princess Derling. For convenience, I will use Yu Sisters’ first name and the modern pinyin Deling rather than Derling when citing their publications in the following text.

28 Rongling, Qinggong suoji, 34, and Deling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 216. However, Carl mentions few details about the fact that she painted Cixi’s portrait after Xunling’s photos in her memoir because she wanted to defend the oil painting’s prestige as a portraitist. See Katharine A. Carl, With the Empress Dowager (New York: The Century Co., 1905).

29 See Rongling, Qinggong suoji, 34, and Deling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 216. See also, Qin Shouou, “Qinggong zui zao de sheyingjia—Xunling (The First Photographer of the Qing Court Xunling),” The Forbidden City 14, no.4 (1982): 5-6.

30 The Palace Museum in Beijing has a complete collection of original glass negatives of Cixi’s photographs. At the same time, according to the information provided by the archivist of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, the Freer Gallery of Art has thirty-four original glass plate negatives of Cixi’s photographs taken by Xunling, which might be reproduced after the original negatives, and were brought to the United States by Deling, and sold by her husband after she died. See also online archives of the Smithsonian Institution: http://siris.archives.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?&profile=all&source=siarchives&uri=full=3100001~!274245~!0#focus.

31 Deling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 223.

32 For details about the amount and genres of Cixi’s photos, see the Qing Court Archive: the Account of Sacred Visage (gongzhong dangbo: shengrong zhang), the 29th year of Guangxu’s reign (1903), cited in Yu Shanpu, “Cixi zhaopian heqi duo (How Many Photographs Does Cixi Have),” The Forbidden City 47, no.4 (1988): 14-15, and Lin, Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian, 16-23.

33 Deling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 219.

34 Ibid., 221-22.

35 Lin, Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian, 15 and 23. To my knowledge, conferring the ruler’s portraits on officials was a newly invented act along with photographic portraits of Cixi. For the sites where some of Cixi’s photographs were displayed in the imperial palaces, see archival records cited in Yu, “Cixi zhaopian heqi duo,” 15.


37 For these three sub-categories, I refer Lin, Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian, and Hearn, “Qing Imperial Portraiture,” 108-30.
The concept of “directorial photography” was defined by the photo critic A. D. Coleman, referring to a photographic approach in which the photographer artificially arranges tableaux or creates events for making images, rather than faithfully documents. See A.D. Coleman, “The Directorial Mode: Notes towards a Definition,” in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 480-91.


For details of Cixi’s demands, see Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 220.


About notions of Qing emperors’ formal portraits, see Hearn, “Qing Imperial Portraiture,” 108.

For a discussion on notions of rulers’ portraits in the West, see West, *Portraiture*, 72-81.


Wu Hung, *Double Screen*, 211 and 212.

Ibid., 212.

Cixi was obsessed with taking care of herself using food, cosmetics, Chinese herb medicine, and so on. For a survey of Cixi’s daily life, see the website of the Palace Museum [http://www.dpm.org.cn/](http://www.dpm.org.cn/). Her efforts achieved marked results, and Katharine Carl was impressed by Cixi’s youthfulness and grace at her first meeting with Her Majesty.

The Qing Imperial Archives, cited in Lin, *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian*, 34.

This painting is the only painted work of this subject in the Palace Museum’s collection. There is no dating and signature on the painting. Some researchers of the Palace Museum assume that it was painted by the court painters based on the photograph of the same subject, so it should be later than photographs. See Yuan Jie, “Miaoxiang zhuangyan ru huatu (Playing the Role of the Bodhisattva of Compassion in Paintings),” *The Forbidden City* 86, no.1 (1995): 39.


Such paintings, for example, include *The Qianlong Emperor Washing the Elephant* by Ding Guanpeng, *The Qianlong Emperor in His Study* by Castiglione, *The Qianlong Emperor as the Bodhisattva of Wisdom in Mandela* (face painted by Castiglione), and *The Yongzheng Emperor Wearing Daoist Cloth*.

Hearn, “Qing Imperial Portraiture,” 117.

Wu Hung, *Double Screen*, 223.


Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 225

For the negative views on Cixi in Chinese history, see, for example, Zhu Jinpu, and Zhou Wenquan, “Lun Cixi taihou nalashi zhi si (A Discussion of the Empress Dowager Cixi’s Death),” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 30, no.4 (1985): 3.

I will more fully and specifically discuss how Westerners perceived Cixi after 1900 in Chapter Four.

See the archive cited in Yu, “Cixi zhaopian heqi duo,” 15.

I will discuss the details of the dissemination of Cixi’s photographs later in this chapter.

In her late years, Cixi would like to be addressed the “Old Buddha”(lao fo ye)—an special appellation used to only address the emperors during the Qing Dynasty, to accentuate that her position was as high as the Emperor’s.

67 Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, 257.

68 Mr. and Mrs. Macdonald’s opinions are cited in Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, 261.

69 Ibid., 408

70 Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 52-53.

71 Ibid., 191-92.

72 Xunling took a few photographs that record Cixi and her court attendants in Imperial Palaces, but figure 14 is the only one representing her meeting with foreign ladies. In the archive, this photograph was developed into only three prints, rather than large numbers, so I assume that they might not have been presented to foreigners as gift, see the archive cited in Yu, “Cixi zhaopian heqi duo,” 15.

73 Here, I am indebted to Dr. Heather McPherson’s suggestions.


75 Many of photos were hand colored by the court artisans because Cixi preferred the brightly colored portrait to the black and white one that was not considered auspicious. But there is little evidence of other retouching. See Lin, *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian*, 25.

76 For use of monarch’s images in the West, see West, *Portraiture*, 66-68, and Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 47.


78 For this anecdote, see Yuxi, “Cixi liangxiang waiguo youpiao yougan (Thoughts on Cixi’s Appearance on Foreign Stamps),” *Shiji*, no. 4 (1997): 22.

79 See Lin, *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian*, 16, 18, 19, and 23. For archives, also cited in Yu, “Cixi zhaopian heqi duo,” 14-15. For instance, based on a comparison, I assume that the two pictures in figure 1 (a) and (b) might be different prints that were developed from the same negative, but one was reversed in the developing process. They are both in the Palace Museum’s collection, and more information on these two photographs, such as whether they were deliberately reversed when being developed, needs further investigation.
Shibao (Eastern Times), 12 June 1904, cited in Wang Rui’s catalogue essay “Qinggong sheying de shiji yinzheng yu zhengzhi xushi (The Historical Evidence and Political Narrative of Photography in the Qing Court)” for the 2009 Guangzhou Photo Biennial. For the full version of this article, see the official website of the Biennial, http://www.gdmoa.org/zhanlan/international/8/1/7/15377.jsp. But I cannot find more specific information on which photos were sold.


This is recorded in Vos’s private letters, and cited in Seagrave, Dragon Lady, 415. It is also cited in Luke S. K. Kwong, “Cixi xiezhao de xubi (The Continuation of Cixi’s Portraits),” Gugong bowuyuan yuankan 87, no.1 (2001): 73. In an interview by the New York Times, Hubert Vos mentioned that he was allowed to take photos of Cixi, but the negative had to be destroyed since the Qing government feared the photographers would sell copies. See “Painting an Empress,” 8(X). The Japanese photographer S. Yamamoto (山本赞七郎) ran a photograph studio in Beijing at the time and captured many street scenes and genre photographs of old Beijing. Yamamoto also served as a documentary photographer for the Japanese army during the Alliance’s invasion in Beijing in 1900. According to Qing bai lei chao (A Compiled Legend of the Qing Dynasty), which was edited by Xu Ke and published at the early twentieth century, Cixi commissioned Yamamoto to take one photograph of her in the Summer Palace and paid him twenty thousand teals. But this is not officially recorded in the Qing Court archives, and no such photograph exists today.

Zhongwai erbai mingren zhaoxiang quanc (Two Hundred Photographs of Famous Persons in China and Abroad) (Shanghai: Youzheng shuju, 1906), cited in Stuart and Rawski, Worshipping the Ancestors, 167. This book collects Cixi, Guangxu, and many Qing well-known political figures’ photographs.

West, Portraiture, 67-69.

Brilliant, Portraiture, 47.


“Painting an Empress,” 8(X).

Some scholars state that the late Qing imperial photographs served as “a tool for transforming subjects into the citizens of a modern nation.” See, Stuart and Rawski, Worshipping the Ancestors, 167.

Influential foreign artists also include Giovanni Gherardini (Nie Yunlong 1655-1723?) and Charles de Belleville (Wei Jialu 1657-1730). The Western artists, not
only took responsibility for the painting projects, but also taught Chinese court painters the Western pictorial techniques.

90 This originally was recorded in the Italian missionary Matteo Ripa’s memoir, cited in Wang Qi, “Kangxi huangdi xiaoxianghua ji xiangguan wenti (The Kangxi Emperor’s Portraits and Related Issues),” Gugong bowuyuan yuankan 111, no. 1 (2004): 55.

91 Nie Chongzheng, “Lang Shining he tade lishi hua, youhua zuopin (Castiglione and His Historical and Oil Paintings),” Gugong bowuyuan yuankan 5, no. 3 (1979): 39-43.

92 Wang, “Kangxi huangdi xiaoxianghua ji xiangguan wenti,” 42.

93 The sitter in the Portrait of a Lady in Martial Attire is unidentified. The Emperor Qianlong also commissioned Attiret to paint oil portraits of the Mongolian clan leaders, who submitted to the Qing central government in 1754, and commissioned Sickeltart and Joseph Panzi (Pan Tingzhang 1733-1812) to paint oil portraits of the meritorious officers who made great contributions in the two wars to suppress the Jinchuan Rebels in Sichuan during 1771-1776. Today, fifteen portraits of them remained and are preserved in the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. Yet, according to some Chinese art historians, these portraits might be studies for figural depictions in grandiose historical paintings or the formal portraits that would be hung at the Hall of Purple Light (Ziguang Ge), where the Emperor initially received tribute offerings and foreign ambassadors, and later became a commemorating hall for the court loyal officials and warriors. See Nie Chongzheng, “Xi Bolin guan Qing gongting huaji (Record of Viewing the Qing Court Paintings in West Berlin),” Gugong bowuyuan yuankan 33, no.3 (1986): 63. About the oil paintings in the Qing court, see Nie Chongzheng, “Qingdai gongting youhua shulue (A Overview of Oil Paintings at the Qing Court),” Gugong bowuyuan jianyuan qishi zhounian tekan (The Special Issue of the Palace Museum Journal Dedicated to the Seventieth Anniversary of the Palace Museum), (September 1995): 46-51.

94 In Wang’s paper, he assumes that this portrait of Kangxi is more likely a study. See Wang, “Kangxi huangdi xiaoxianghua ji xiangguan wenti,” 51.

95 In Nie and Wang’s papers, they list media of most Qing emperors’ oil portraits. See Nie, “Qingdai gongting youhua shulue,” 47-50, and Wang, ““Kangxi huangdi xiaoxianghua ji xiangguan wenti,” 42. This phenomena is probably due to the limited availability of the material of canvas in the court.

96 Nie,“Qingdai gongting youhua shulue,” 51.

97 Another version is that Carl was born in 1850 in Memphis, Tennessee. See the official website of the Tennessee Portraits Project conducted by the National Society of Colonial Dames of America, http://www.tnportraits.org/vance-bessie-brooks.htm.
According to Rongling, Carl was around forty years old when she came into the Qing Court in 1903. So the version of 1865 is more reliable. See Rongling, *Qinggong suoji*, 32. Also, the official catalogue of the Paris Exposition of 1900 recorded that she was born in Louisiana, see *Official Illustrated Catalogue, Fine Arts Exhibit, United States of America, Paris Exposition, 1900* (Boston: Noyes, Platt & Company, 1900), 10. But the version that she was born in Memphis was incorrectly picked up by the jurors of the St. Louis World’s Fair.


99 Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 204.

100 Carl’s painting *The Mirror* was chosen for the fine arts exhibit of the United States at the Paris International Exposition of 1900, see *Official Illustrated Catalogue, Fine Arts Exhibit, United States of America, Paris Exposition, 1900*, 70.

101 See Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 205-6, 212, and 283.

102 According to Carl’s memoir, figure 15 was the first one Carl painted. The second portrait she embarked on was an informal portrait that Cixi wanted to be painted “in her ordinary dress and without the Manchu coiffure” and allowed Carl to paint her two dogs “lying beside her footstool.” The St. Louis portrait was the third one Carl worked on. Carl did not mention too many details of the last portrait she finished. See Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 162-63, 172-73, 215-17, and 302-03.

103 Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 162-63.

104 Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 231.

105 The use of bright yellow color in costume was strictly regulated at the Qing court. For the symbolism of the yellow color and regulation of costume in the Qing Dynasty, see Yan Yong, “Qingdai fushi dengji (The Rank of Costume during the Qing Dynasty),” *The Forbidden City* 165, no. 10 (2008): 72-75.


109 Seals have been used as symbols of imperial authority in Chinese history, since the seal’s mark was necessary to put official edicts into effect. The Qing ruler’s official
seal bears characters in both Manchurian and Chinese script, and the format and details are regulated in the Collective Rituals of the Qing Dynasty (Daqing huidian). Qing emperors had a great variety of seals for different purposes or occasions, and Cixi had more than 150 seals. The seal represented in this image was usually used on Cixi’s favorite paintings and calligraphy collections. About Cixi’s seals, see Yu Shanpu, “Cixi xiyin zhi duoshao (How Many Seals Does Cixi Own),” The Forbidden City 99, no.2 (1998): 17-18.

110 The Eastern Pearl originates in the Northeast of China, the birthplace of Manchu, so it was highly valued by the Qing court. The use of the Eastern Pearl is strictly regulated, for instance, only the emperor, empress dowager, and empress can wear the ceremonial court necklace made of 108 Eastern Pearls. For a more detailed discussion, see Zhang Shuzhi, “Dongzhu—Qing wangchao huangquan de xiangzheng (Eastern Pearl—the Symbolic of the Qing Imperial Power),” in Qingdai gongshi tanwei (The Exploration of the Qing Court History), ed. The Society of the Qing Court History (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1991), 352-360. Cixi’s mantle was made of about 3500 Eastern Pearls, see Lin, Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian, 42. Cixi frequently wore this pearl mantle to receive foreigner ladies, who were extremely impressed by its elaboration, so Carl describes it as “famous mantle,” see Carl, With the Empress Dowager, 216.

111 Cixi learned art under instruction of court artists, and produced a number of paintings and calligraphy. See Ka Bo Tsang, “In Her Majesty’s Service: Woman Painters in China at the Court of the Empress Dowager Cixi,” 43-49.

112 Carl, With the Empress Dowager, 297, but this documentary photograph cannot be found today. The portrait sent to St. Louis was loaned to the National Museum of History in Taiwan in the 1960s and is exhibited there now, so the Smithsonian does not have a colorful illustration of it. Xunling also took a documentary photograph of Carl’s first portrait of Cixi (figure 15), see figure 17. The painting belongs to the Palace Museum in Beijing, but the documentary photograph is in the Freer Gallery of Art collection.

113 As to the debate between the artist and the sitter about how to render Cixi’s face, see Deling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 352.

114 According to Chinese traditional calendrical system of sexagenary cycles, the cyclic year Jiachen of the Guangxu emperor’s reign is 1904.

115 For examples, there are written “Humbly painted by Courtier Lang Shining” in inscriptions of many paintings produced by Castiglione.

116 Deling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 352

117 According to Carl’s description in her reminiscences, the second portrait she accomplished represents Cixi in her ordinary dress. Also, Carl obtained permission from Her Majesty to paint Cixi’ two favorite pet dogs, the blond shadaze and dusky hailo,
lying beside the footstool in this more private image that was intended to be viewed by Cixi’s intimates. See Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 172. It seems that Carl intended to accentuate Cixi’s domestic role and sense of harmony of her everyday life in this portrait.

118 See Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 11, 38, 50, and 112-13; and Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 233 and 237.

119 Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 204 and 282.

120 Ibid., 239, and Rongling, *Qinggong suoji*, 36. But in Carl’s reminiscences, she did not mention this fact. Instead, she wrote, when the portrait for St. Louis was advancing, “Her Majesty came, with her usual retinue, to pose, but it was not at fixed times, and was often when I did not expect her…but she came to pose whenever it was necessary, and was very particular as to all the details in the portrait.” See, Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 237.

121 Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 210.

122 Ibid., 211 and 306.

123 Ibid., 211.

124 Ibid., 163.


126 Ibid., 238.

127 Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 205-06, 212, and 283.

128 Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 233-35.

129 Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 305.


131 Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 212.


133 Cixi told Deling, “We can treat her [Carl] as a prisoner without her knowing it.” See Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 207.

134 Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 234 and 282-83.
Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 100.

Ibid., 101.

Ibid., 161.

Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 180

Vos commented that Carl’s portrait “told nothing” in his letters to friends and family, which is cited in Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, 415.

For Vos’s biographic information, see Stebbins, Orcutt, and Anderson, ed., *American Paintings at Harvard*, 386.


“Painting an Empress,” 8(X).

Interestingly, according to the *New York Times*, the Dutch Legation did not know the fact that Vos had already become an American citizen until he arrived in China. Vos wrote about his experience of painting the Empress Dowager’s portraits in Beijing in his private letters, which are kept by his grandson Hubert D. Vos. In Kwong’s article, he translates Vos’s letters into Chinese and published it as an appendix, see Luke S. K. Kwong, “Cixi xiezhao de xubi (The Continuation of Cixi’s Portraits),” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 87, no.1 (2001): 76-81.

Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, 414.

Kwong, “Cixi xiezhao de xubi,” 73.

“Painting an Empress,” 8(X).

The exact information on the exhibition of this portrait in Paris Salon still remained unclear. See also the online archive of Fogg Museum, Harvard University, 1943.162, http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collection/.

“Painting an Empress,” 8(X); Also, in Virginia Anderson’s unpublished essay “A Semi-Chinese Picture: The Encounter of American Painter Huber Vos and the Empress Dowager of China,” which she presented at the symposium “A Long and Tumultuous Relationship: East-West Interchanges in American Art” held by the
Smithsonian American Art Museum in October 2009, she argues that both of Vos’s portraits of Cixi are “hybrids” of western realism and Chinese imperial portraiture. But I only can obtain an abstract of this paper posted online, see http://americanart.si.edu/research/symposia/2009/east_west_abstracts.pdf.

150 Vos’s letters, translated and cited in Kwong, “Cixi xiezhao de xubi,” 76-80. See also Kwong, “No Shadows,” 42.

151 Vos’s letters, cited in Kwong, “Cixi xiezhao de xubi,” 80. See also Kwong, “No Shadows,” 43.

152 Ibid., cited in Kwong, “Cixi xiezhao de xubi,” 81.

153 “Painting an Empress,” 8(X).

154 West, Portraiture, 140-41.


158 For details, see “The Siege of Beijing Legations,” Times, 13 and 15 October 1900, 5.

159 According to the New York Times report of 1905, this portrait would be hung in “the National Museum,” see “China’s Gift to America—Dowager Empress Presents Her Portrait to the United States,” New York Times, 18 February 1905, 4. According to the Smithsonian American Art Museum archive, this portrait was “gift of the Imperial Chinese Government,” see Smithsonian American Art Museum online archive http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=3758. The painting was loaned to the National Museum of History in Taipei, Taiwan, and has not been recalled by the Smithsonian yet.

160 For the foreign powers’ interference in state affairs of the Qing court, see Guo Weidong, “Guangxu diwei weiji yu waiguo ganyu (The Crisis of Guangxu Emperor’s Throne and the Foreign Powers’ Interference),” Gugong bowuyuan yuankan 62, no.4 (1993): 71-78.

161 For a recent study on the Boxer Rebellion, see Diana Preston, Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Study of China’s War on Foreigners that Shook the World in the Summer of 1900 (New York: Walker, 2000). For the compilation of foreigners’ letters and diaries


163 Robert W. Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Vision of Empire at American International Exposition, 1876-1916* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1984), 49. This explanation of why the Qing Government refused to participate in the Fair has been commonly accepted.

164 The Imperial Maritime Customs Service (IMCS) was founded by foreign consuls in Shanghai in 1854 to collect maritime trade taxes for the Qing Government, and its head and senior staff were foreigners. After the position of the Inspector-General (I. G, also served by foreigners) was established in 1861, its duties expanded to domestic customs administration, postal administration, harbor management, and some diplomatic activities. Although the IMCS was a Chinese governmental agency and IG was employed by the Qing government, the IMCS and IG had absolute autonomy in the custom affairs, and became almost independent of the Qing Court.

The IMCS also took almost full responsibility for organizing the Chinese exhibitions at over twenty world’s fairs before 1904, such as the International Exhibition of 1873 in Vienna and the Paris Expositions of 1889 and 1900. The Chinese delegations to the international expositions before 1904 were led by foreign IMCS officials. Therefore, there is a debate on whether the China’s participation in the international expositions before 1904 could be regarded official. Some Chinese historians consider that in the real sense, China’s first official attendance at the World’s Fair is at the St. Louis World’s Fair of 1904, because that it was directly funded and sponsored by the Qing central government, and the Chinese delegation was led by Chinese high ranking officials, rather than the IMCS, whose administrative system was actually dominated by foreigners. See, Wu Songdi, “Zouxiang shijie: Zhongguo canjia zaoqi shijie bolanhui de lishi yanjiu (Moving toward the World: A Research on History of China’s Participation in the Early International Expositions),” *Shilin*, no.2 (2009): 47-48.


168 Cortinovis, “China at the St. Louis Fair,” 62. Mr. Huang’s name was spelled as Wong Kai-Kah at the time.
Manchuria commonly referred to the area of Northeastern China, including Liaoning, Heilongjiang, and Jilin Provinces.

For Cixi’s anxiety about the Japan-Russia War, see Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 312 and 345, and Rongling, *Qinggong suoji*, 58-59.


The Sacred image of the Empress Dowager was not allowed to be upside down. See, Rongling, *Qinggong suoji*, 38.


Carl observed that “In prominent places, each flanked by good-luck pennants, hung two steel-engravings: the first representing Queen Victoria in regal array; the second, the Queen and Prince Consort, surrounded by their children and grandchildren.” See Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 206-207. Rongling’s book mentions the scene that the Empress Dowager Cixi received the Russian envoy and the photographic portraits of the Czar. See, Rongling, *Qinggong suoji*, 49-50.

One of Rongling and Deling’s everyday assignments was to interpret the foreign newspaper articles and reports for Cixi, who therefore knew the public opinions on herself in the external world. Facing the serious outcomes brought by the Boxer Rebellion, Cixi told Deling that supporting the Boxer movement was “the only mistake I have made in my life.” See Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 357.

Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 336.

The art works on the subject of Queen Victoria include Georges Scott de Plagnolles’s *Funeral of Queen Victoria*, John Charlton’s *The End of a Glorious Reign*:
Funeral of Queen Victoria, William Nicholson’s Portrait of the Late Queen Victoria, and Thomas Brock’s statue Contemplation, Memorial to Queen Victoria. For details, see Skiff and Ives, Official Catalogue of Exhibitors, 151, 191, 206, and 209.

181 The North China Daily News (Zi lin xi bao) and the North China Herald (Bei hua jie bao) were founded by British businessman Henry Shearman and published in the Shanghai International Settlement. So they could be freed from the Qing court censorship, and became the most influential English newspapers in Shanghai. The editors of these two newspapers shared their obvious dislike for Cixi, and many of their descriptions of Cixi were adopted by the Western publications. See, Sterling Seagrave, Dragon Lady, 266.

182 Cixi commented that “Mrs. Conger is a very nice lady.” See, Derling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 176.

183 For instance, Conger had introduced to Her Majesty a missionary lady who thereby had the opportunity to suggest Cixi to establish a girls’ school in the Palace. See Deling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 176.


186 “Painting an Empress,” 8(X).

187 However, these female’s perceptions of Cixi were despised as “uninformed and trivial” and unaccepted by their contemporary male journalists. See Seagrave, Dragon Lady, 13 and 409. In this book, Seagrave fully admits that the insights the women writers provided are “useful and refresh.”


190 John Ottway Percy Bland and E Backhouse, China under the Empress Dowager-Being History and the Life of Times of Tzu Hsi [Cixi] (New York: Houghton Mifflin company, 1914), 202, note 1. About the men’s sneer, for example, about the scene of Conger’s first meeting with Cixi when the tea party was resumed in 1902, Morrison wrote that, the Empress Dowager grasped Conger’s hands, sobbing loudly,

In fact, Conger rebutted that Morrison made up the scene to mock her and Cixi. She clarified that “there was nothing said by either of us about forgiving and forgetting. Her Majesty's manner in the banquet hall was dignified and earnest…” She also complained that “There were sharp and bitter criticisms of the ladies’ acceptance of the Imperial invitation. Individual bitterness still has its poison and would keep the breach open [between China and the West] and even widen it is possible. ” About these two statements, see Conger, Letters from China, 236 and 222. Seagrave points out that the criticism of women from the masculine world reflected the “male chauvinism,” see Dragon Lady, 407.

191 Morrison wrote in her diary, cited in Seagrave, Dragon Lady, 406.

192 Conger, Letters from China, Forward, viii, and 41.

193 Ibid., Forward, viii.

194 Ibid., 247.

195 Ibid., 248.

196 At that time, foreigners had a fascination with the exotic Manchu costumes, and the Chinese commissioners’ wardrobes became an eye catching subject of many St. Louis newspapers. See, Sue Bradford Edwards, “Imperial East Meets Democratic West: The St. Louis Press and the Fair’s Chinese Delegation,” Gateway Heritage 17, no.2 (Fall 1996): 37.

197 Aldridge, “The Empress Dowager Cixi in Western Fiction,” 114.

198 See Kathleen Gray Nelson, Tuen, Slave, and Empress (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1898). This novel has only one edition, and has never been reprinted.


200 Cited in Seagrave, Dragon Lady, 10.

201 Hardee, “China’s Remarkable Exhibit at the World’s Fair,” 8.

The ordinary members of the Chinese delegation who presented at the Fair received a negative and harsh treatment. See Edwards, “Imperial East Meets Democratic West,” 32-41. See also Rydell, All the World’s Fair, 180.


See Carol Ann Christ, “‘The Sole Guardians of the Art Inheritance of Asia’: Japan and China at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair,” Positions 8, no.3 (Winter 2000):700-701. But Christ has not clarified the reason for the change of arrangement and reclassification.

In this paper, Christ offers an ideological analysis on Chinese and Japanese exhibits at the St. Louis Fair, pointing out that the Chinese exhibits at the St. Louis Fair were not arranged in the “exhibitionary order,” a terminology coined by Timothy Mitchell, and in which the objects were presented and arranged in exhibits to “evoke some larger meaning.” On the contrary, Japan effectively applied the “order” to arranged the Japanese exhibits, and therefore to promote themselves as a new imperial power and to define the “Chinese subordinate status,” see Christ, “The Sole Guardians of the Art Inheritance of Asia,”700. See also Timothy Mitchell, “Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order,” in Colonialism and Culture, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 289-318.

Christ also argues that the portrait of Cixi “worked to the benefit of the Chinese because it portrayed the empress, who just four years earlier had declared war on the Allied powers during the Boxer Rebellion, as accessible and perhaps a bit less imperious.” See, Christ, 702. However she failed to provide any evidence and further analysis, Christ such statement about the Fair planners’ reason for exhibit Cixi’s portrait is not convincing to me.

Christ, “‘The Sole Guardians of the Art Inheritance of Asia’: Japan and China at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair,” 694-95.

Ibid, 695.

See Skiff and Ives, Official Catalogue of Exhibitors, Foreword. See also Cortinovis, “China at the St. Louis World’s Fair,” 64.

Skiff and Ives, Official Catalogue of Exhibitors, Foreword, 17.


“Report of Board of Lady Managers,” 455.
Besides Carl’s portrait of Cixi, one of Huber Vos’s portraits of Cixi was displayed at Paris Salon in 1906, only two years after the St. Louis Exposition. This time, it is most likely that Cixi had no idea about the exhibition of her portrait at the Paris Salon. Also beyond Her Majesty’s imagination, her “sacred image” became a commodity and was eventually sold to the Fogg Museum of Harvard University through the New York Kende Galleries in 1940. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this thesis, I found little information on the public exhibition of Vos’s portrait of Cixi. Vos’s published letters do not mention its exhibition. The Fogg Museum curatorial archives do not have further detailed information on its exhibition history either. Due to lack of documentation on the display of Vos’s portrait of Cixi at the Paris Salon, I have to concentrate on Carl’s portrait to probe how Westerners received and reacted to the portrait of the Chinese ruler, and what kinds of factors shaped their reception of Cixi and her image.

See the *Official Guide to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (St. Louis: The Official Guide Co. 1904).


Walter Williams, “Round the World at the World’s Fair: Strange and Curious Sights at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 68, no. 5 (September 1904): 798. Many Western publications of the day confused about Cixi’s honorific title with her con-regent Empress Dowager Ci’an’s.

As to these magazine articles, for example, see Comtesse de Montaigu, “What Women Are Doing in America,” *Womanhood* 11, no. 65 (April 1904): 288, and “Men and Women of the Month,” *World Today* 8, (May 1905): 544-45.


Ibid.

“Men and Women of the Month,” 544.

“China’s Woman Ruler Americanizing Her Empire,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 October 1904, 1(F).

Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, Introductory, xxi.

According to Carl, these words first appeared in the *Times*, see Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, Introductory, xxi-xxii. But I cannot find them at the *Times* archive. The *Chicago Tribune* did cite such statements; see “China's Woman Ruler Americanizing Her Empire,” 1(F).

Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, Introductory, xxii.


Carl’s memoir, recast to a certain degree, appears superficial and one-sided. The critiques of Carl’s book and her opinions of Cixi might also be related to the male bias against Carl, as she was a woman whose views were perhaps distained by men.

For the negative image of Chinese and anti-Chinese sentiments in the US, see Edwards, “Imperial East Meets Democratic West,” 34-35.

See Christ, “The Sole Guardians of the Art Inheritance of Asia,” 700. Christ notes that Chinese exhibits were arranged by places of their manufacturer, rather than by “official fair categories of media and technique.”


This was originally recorded in Zhang Jiye, “Ji sanluyisi bolanhui zhongguoren rusai qingxing (Recording China at the St. Louis World’s Fair),” *Dongfang zazhi*, vol.2, no.9 (1905): 5. I found this article on internet, see http://www.xici.net/#d96522593.htm.


The related research on the issue of the Chinese art exhibitions and the British perceptions of China in the nineteenth century has been contributed by art historians. For example, Catherine Pagani has pointed out that in the mid-nineteenth century, the writings in British press described Chinese as “untamed savages.” At the same time, the Chinese art exhibition in Britain was used not only to express the British superiority over China, but also to “educate” the public to “read” and understand China and Chinese culture through its art. Pagani has also noted that even though the Chinese art was admired, they were not able to improve or flattering the British’ perception of China and Chinese. See Catherine Pagani, “Chinese Material Culture and British Perceptions of China in the Mid-nineteenth Century,” in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 28-52, and “Objects and the Press: Images of China in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” in *Imperial Co-histories: National Identities and the British and Colonial Press*, ed. Julie F. Codell (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003)147-166.

In addition, for an discussion on Chinese exhibits at the St. Louis Fair applying the concepts of the “exhibitionary order” coined by Timothy Mitchell, see Christ, “The Sole Guardians of the Art Inheritance of Asia,” 675-709.
Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, *China, the Long-Lived Empire* (New York: The Century Co, 1900), 106 and 142.


Foord, “China’s Empress Dowager,” 15. Foord’s article quoted the opinions of “Shanghai press,” which most likely refers to the English newspaper the *North China Daily News*, and its weekly version *North China Herald*. The term might also include the Shanghai agency of the London *Times*. The Shanghai correspondent of the *Times* was John Ottway Percy Bland, who made many negative statements about Cixi in collaboration with Morrison. In 1910, Bland and Edmund Backhouse, who had served in the Custom Service, published *China under the Empress Dowager*, which depicts Cixi as a sexually promiscuous and cruel tyrant. See Bland and Backhouse, *China under the Empress Dowager: Being History and the Life of Times of Tzu Hsi [Cixi].* Seagrave calls their biography of Cixi as “pornography” and “hoax” of Cixi, see Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, 285.


Many of Kang’s articles were published in the *China Discussion* founded and edited by Liang Qichao. Western journalists who were in favor of Liang and Kang’s anti-Manchu propaganda and reformist view, republished their writings in a number of foreign newspapers. For the summery of Kang’s literal attacks on Cixi and how his statements were circulated to the West, see Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, 10-11, 263-272, and Foord, “China’s Empress Dowager,” 15. According to Seagrave’s textual research, Kang considerably embellished many narratives about Cixi and her private life.


In fact, I found two images of the same postcard: one was sold at an auction held in China at 2002 fall, and is dated as 1907 by the auction; while the other one shown in figure 20 was from a private collection with original signature and date from its sender. Unfortunately I am not able to access to the original auction catalogue, and I assume that the auction’s dating may be inaccurate.

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