The Culture of War in China

Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty

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LONDON. NEW YORK
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have existed.\textsuperscript{28} Such, for example, was part of the Qianlong emperor’s goal in identifying, late in his reign, his “ten complete victories,” as we shall see in the next chapter. Without doubt the “project” involved considerable serendipity and the seizing of opportunity as well as steady deliberation and successful planning. With this in mind, we turn now to a sketch of the broad chronological framework within which the militarization of culture took place, although Qing emperors themselves may not have understood what they were doing in so continuous or well demarcated a way.

**The Phases of the Qing Imperial Project**

With benefit of hindsight it is possible to divide the active implementation of the Qing imperial project into three escalating phases. The first phase ran from 1636, the year the Manchus first proclaimed their Qing empire, to 1681, the year when they finally suppressed the eight-year Rebellion of the Three Feudatories (sanfan). The second phase ran from 1681 to 1760, the year in which Qing armies exterminated the Zunghars and incorporated the vast area of Central Asia known as Xinjiang into their empire. In the last decade of the second phase there began a period of transition from the expansion to the consolidation of the empire. The onset of that transition can be dated to 1749, when at least in retrospect we can see that the Qianlong emperor began to promote much more systematically than before the militarization of those areas of cultural life in which the state was directly concerned. The third phase ran from 1760 to 1799, the year in which the Qianlong emperor passed away. After that time the escalating struggle against internal uprisings, dramatic economic downturn, and the western imperialism that resumed in earnest after the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, combined forces to put an end to the extraordinary imperial dynamism of the high Qing era, even though the empire itself lasted for another century.

**The First Phase, 1636-1681**

1636 marks the onset of the first phase of the Qing imperial project in terms of both military expansion and cultural reinforcement, although Nurhaci (1559-1626), the man who would later be hailed as founding dynasty, had already been dead for ten years. Nor would the Qing enter Beijing and claim control over China itself for another ten years. But 1636 was the year in which Nurhaci’s son Hung Taiji proclaimed a new Qing dynasty and openly launched the campaign to bring China into the empire. During this first phase, the creation of a substantive, expansive Qing empire was still more wishful than probable, and the strong emphasis placed on military achievement was as much the logical consequence of the raw fact of conquest as it was part of a self-conscious project linking culture, empire, and martial prowess.
Already during this early phase of empire-building emperors frequently reiterated the critical importance of martial valour to imperial success, not least because of the power of the Jin and Ming precedents, mentioned above. Thus at the very outset of the empire, Hung Taiji expressed what was to become a mantra of his imperial successors: “What I fear is this: that the children and grandchildren of later generations will abandon the Old [Manchu] Way, neglect shooting and riding, and enter into the Chinese Way.” This declaration, which much later Qianlong ordered engraved onto stelae and displayed wherever bannermen underwent military training, set the tone for much of what followed.

Early Qing rulers also had clearly already grasped the importance of controlling Tibet and its symbolism, as we can see from the inclusion of deities important to Tibetan-Buddhism in the temples and other construction projects undertaken at the pre-conquest capital of Shenyang, and in the invitation extended by the first ruler of Qing China, the Shunzhi Emperor (1644-1661) to the Dalai Lama. That dignitary’s visit to China in 1652 established good relations between the Manchu rulers of China and the Tibetans, although it involved enormously complicated diplomatic manoeuvring in order to satisfy the protocol concerning the respective status of emperor and cleric.

The superimposition of a new, hereditary elite, the banners, onto Chinese society was one of the most important acts marking the first phase of the Qing imperial project. A pre-conquest military-administrative formation, the banner structure called for eight separate organizations each for Manchus, Mongols, and Chinese-martial” (hanjun)—the latter being originally northern Chinese who had joined the Manchu cause before the Ming fall. It thus delineated new quasi-ethnic distinctions, and created a new elite parallel to but distinct from Chinese whose claim to elevated social status rested on their superior education and literary accomplishments, not on their martial valour.

Banner distinctiveness also changed the physical landscape through the installation of garrisons that often were located in the heart of existing cities, dislodging Chinese residents to make room for them. Known as the “Manchu cities” (mancheng), these compounds were set aside for the exclusive use of banner troops and their families and households. As the garrison cities became progressively incorporated into the backdrop of daily life over time, they became, literally, “part of the landscape;” as a daily reminder of the Qing’s original status as occupying conquerors, and by their references to military organization, they effectively militarized the everyday physical environment. Thus by the end of the first phase the martial ethos had begun both conceptually and visually to infiltrate the broader cultural arena although no definite programme to transform culture appears yet to have taken shape.
The Second Phase, 1681-1760

During the second phase of the Qing imperial project, wars of imperial expansion became a defining characteristic of Qing rule. Qing victory over the Three Feudatories in 1681 concluded that early period in which their overthrow had still remained an open possibility. Two years later they pacified Taiwan, a last bastion of resistance, and turned their attention to the Northwest. In that region, from the 1680s to 1760, through the reigns of three emperors, the Qing pursued a series of campaigns, first against Russia and then in Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang), where the imperial ambitions of the Zunghars threatened their own. During the same period a combination of strategic alliances and armed interventions secured Qing domination of first Mongolia and then Tibet. Eventually the Qing annexed Xinjiang and eliminated the Zunghars for good. This achievement marked the conclusion of the expansionist phase of the Qing empire.

During this period emperors often reiterated Hung Taiji's classic call for the maintenance of Manchu identity, with the martial virtues that supposedly embodied, and more generally for military preparedness. Both Kangxi and Qianlong, with a nod to the classic military text, *Sima Fa* (The Marshal's Art of War) explicitly regarded this as the most effective means of maintaining peace in the empire, and made clear that it "could not be laid aside even for one day."31 Qianlong, too, in his very first year as emperor succinctly reiterated what his grandfather Kangxi had often repeated:

> Since ancient times, the way of governing the country has been to manage civil affairs while simultaneously exerting oneself in military affairs. Indeed, soldiers may not be mobilized for one hundred years, but they may not be left unprepared for one day. Although the state has been at peace for a long time, military preparedness should remain a top priority."32

The expression of such sentiments may have functioned as a way to recast the origins of a cultural campaign that took coherent form only later.

During this period a whole range of developments took place in political life, in social structure, in ritual activity and in public spectacle, all of which provided cultural support for military expansion. Amongst the most spectacular was the institution of imperial hunts undertaken annually to serve as both military training exercises and full-scale peacetime display of Qing military power. Other important changes from this period took place in the structure and culture of government, which saw increased access to political power as a consequence of successful military service (in the field or on the staff) and a
consequent militarization of the style of government; and in society itself. All
these developments are addressed in Chapters Four and Five.

The Transition Years, 1749-1760

The 1750s marked a period of transition from the second to the third phase of the
Qing imperial project, and from its expansionist to its consolidation phase. In that
decade, not only did it gradually become clear that the annexation of Xinjiang
would eventually come to fruition, but also the comprehensiveness of Qianlong's
pursuit of military culture first became manifest. In the 1740s the First Jinchuan
War, fought in the mountainous borderlands between western Sichuan province
and Tibet, had proved more intractable than anticipated; victory was achieved
only after the dismissal and dramatic execution of both generals following a trial
over which the emperor himself presided. Feeling perhaps that imperial honour
had been at stake, at war's end the emperor launched the first of a series of monu-
mental and historiographical commemorations of Qing wars. Later he would re-
tractively elevate the first Jinchuan war to first in the series of his “Ten Complete
Military Victories” (shi quan wen gong), discussed in the next chapter. The same year
saw the formal creation of the Office of Military Archives (fangliuquan) for the
recording and narration in approved form of all the Qing imperial wars, in other
words to “spin” the historiographical record, and the establishment of new sets of
regulations that institutionalized the performance of various military rituals. 1749
appears, in other words, to have marked the moment when the embrace of military
power and a concerted campaign to underpin it in cultural terms emerged into the
open for the first time.

During the 1750s, by now espousing war as a defining feature of Qing rule,
the emperor began to devote much greater attention to the militarization of
culture, in such forms as the erection of numerous commemorative temples and
monuments, the institutionalization of military rituals, and the dissemination of
innumerable textual references to military success, including in maps of newly
conquered regions. The attention Qianlong devoted to accumulating and commemorating military victories may be seen as a variant manifestation of
his well-known mania for collecting, which among other things exemplified the
propensity of Qing rulers for co-opting cultural practices common among their
subjects. In this instance military victories became the object of his passion. In
this context it is worth revisiting Qianlong's famous dictum, made in an edict to
the British ambassador Macartney in 1793, that “We possess all things.” The
statement has generally been regarded as an expression of undiluted arrogance
and superiority, but it is better understood not as descriptive of an attitude but
as a prescriptive claim encapsulating a very real desire for total imperial control
reaching, simply, everywhere.33
The escalation of the various fronts of the cultural campaign from the late 1740s on resulted in part from accumulated momentum, and in part from the almost obsessive attention of the Qianlong emperor to matters of war, empire, and history. Qianlong has often been denigrated as more concerned with appearance than substance, but the reality was that his personality, his wishes, and his will were crucial to the conceptualization and realization of empire. Although he was not the original initiator of the project to militarize culture, in the end he was the central actor in its realization.

Qianlong even more than his predecessors was powerfully motivated by a strong concern for histories both past and future. He both cultivated the art of elaborating what came before—seizing and moulding ancient Chinese and Mongol precedents as well as those of such more immediate ancestors as his grandfather Kangxi and great-great-grandfather Hung Taiji to suit his own purposes—and left the empire in every sense very different from what it had once been.

Closely related to Qianlong's sense of history was a second factor: his commitment to Tibetan-Buddhism. This commitment involved both personal faith and his perception of its traditions of universal rulership as an indispensable instrument of imperial expansion. As ruler of China, however, Qianlong simultaneously claimed inheritance of the kingly way of the Zhou rulers of Chinese antiquity, whose legitimacy rested primarily on their moral virtue. Qing emperors' goal of embodying multiple traditions in a single ruler has already been referred to. That objective became more urgent in proportion to imperial expansion, so we should not be surprised to learn that Qianlong's attention to all these matters was greater and notably more systematic than that of his predecessors.

The Third Phase, 1760-1799

Qianlong's promotion of martial values and celebration of war, already advancing to new heights in the transitional phase of the 1750s, came to full fruition in the third phase of the imperial project. In retrospect we can see that his identification of his military triumphs as one of the central accomplishments of his reign was key to this process. It was implicit throughout the third phase even though the emperor articulated it as a coherent project only as he reviewed his achievements towards the end of his life, in 1792. In that year he styled himself "Old Man of the Ten Complete Victories" (shiquan laoren), to underscore the huge importance he ascribed to his successes in warfare. The ten complete victories were all fought on the frontiers of the empire, and included three wars of conquest in Xinjiang, two fought on the Sichuan-Tibetan borderlands to suppress rebellious Jinchuan minorities; two wars against the Gurkhas in Nepal, and wars in Burma, Vietnam, and Taiwan. This list of ten by no means included all the campaigns of his long
THE CULTURE OF WAR IN CHINA

Thus the period sometimes referred to as "Pax Sinica," and which might more accurately be called "Pax Manjurica," not only saw almost constant warfare, but also that warfare was extensively commemorated in art and literature, in monuments and public buildings, in ritual celebration and in rewards, to the point that praise for the military accomplishments of the age became commonplace across the spectrum of cultural production in the last part of the eighteenth century.

Directly or indirectly, these paeans reached a wide audience. For instance, the fact that military motifs were increasingly displayed on porcelains made in the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen may, at the same time as it reflected the promotion of martial virtues, indicate those ideals’ marketability among Chinese and other subjects of the empire.

To what extent did the militarization of culture affect ordinary people, as distinct from those within the various ranks of the elite? Obviously commoners were unlikely to have seen or appreciated artwork and texts relating to warfare and empire, at least not in the same way as members of the educated elite. Except in the case of palace servants and perhaps their families, they were unlikely to have access to the palaces or other public buildings so central to the imperial project. Yet undoubtedly many were involved in such vital practical work as the manual labour of monument construction, the production and care of textiles, care of horses and other animals, production and maintenance of weaponry, the production of ritual foodstuffs and provisions for the armies, and so on. Ordinary people, too, would have seen and heard the huge, elaborate, and sometimes noisy processions to the sites of such public rituals as seeing off the army, welcoming it back, celebrating victory, and so on. Moreover the great armies that marched across the empire to war and the huge numbers involved in the annual autumn hunts and imperial tours were hardly likely to have passed unnoticed by the general populace through whose lands they passed, and whose food supplies were often severely depleted by military procurement. We cannot ascertain how the display of martiality that the emperors tirelessly promoted changed the way in which the general populace perceived imperial power and its cultural manifestations, but the militaristic emphasis all too evident through the Qianlong era needs to be taken into account as we consider phenomena such as the better understood militarization of local society during the 19th century.

That emphasis was too pervasive to have been invisible, or inaudible within a society where word of mouth typically traveled fast, as in other premodern settings. Thus while the cultural campaign’s immediate audience may have been the relatively narrow circles of the elite who circulated around the imperial centre, its likely audience was as wide-ranging, therefore, as was its probable impact.
War Illustrations, Portraits, and other Commemorative Paintings

Court academicians produced at imperial behest a large number of commemorative paintings, including "Infinite Fortune of the Sage’s Plans," by Qian Weicheng; "The Western Regions" (i.e. the newly conquered region of Xinjiang), by Xu Yang; "Three Victories of the Red Banners," by Hong Wu; numerous works by Giuseppe Castiglione, whose Chinese name was Lang Shining, such as a famous series of paintings depicting horses, instantly recognizable to an educated Qing subject as a war referent; such collaborative works as “Dispatch and Victory of the Jinchuan Army” by Yao Wenhan, Zhou Kun and Zhang Weibang; scrolls depicting the imperial hunts, and many more.42 Especially well known in this category are the series of sixteen war illustrations (zhanhua) executed for Qianlong by four foreign artist priests: the Jesuits Giuseppe Castiglione, Jean-Denis Attiret (Wang Zhicheng), and Ignatius Sichelbart (Ai Qimeng), and the Augustinian Jean-Damascène Salusti (An Deyi). The series included scenes of battle and surrender, and of daring raids, as well as the various triumphs and celebrations that followed victory.

When Qianlong commissioned this series he was building on a long-standing Chinese tradition of commemorative or propagandistic painting—a tradition far less well known than landscape or naturalist painting but nonetheless both venerable and significant. He is said also to have been influenced by some European war paintings, done by the German painter Rugendas (1666-1742), of which he learned from his court Jesuits.43 Perhaps, too, the missionaries had made him aware of such other battle paintings produced in Europe as those displayed at Versailles in France and at El Escorial and Buen Retiro in Spain. Among these the series at El Escorial had been commissioned by King Philip II of Spain, a sixteenth-century monarch who (although Qianlong may well have been unaware of this) had shared both Qianlong’s grand imperial aspirations and the desire to represent himself as performing a divine mission through his military efforts, a resemblance that suggests the neat complementarity of these particular characteristics. The Buen Retiro paintings had been done for Philip IV, who wished to carry on the same tradition.44

With a view to further broadcasting Qing military prowess, Qianlong decided to have mass reproductions of the war illustrations made in the form of copper engravings. These were ordered to be made in Paris from copies of the sixteen war illustrations that were shipped from China on French East India Company ships. There were two main reasons for having the engravings made in France. First, Chinese artists had by then lost the knowledge of that art; second, it is likely that the Qing emperor, who had heard a good deal about the military prowess of the French king, wanted to make his own military might known in those quarters. Several hundred sets of copper engravings eventually were shipped back to China, where more copies were then produced. They bedecked public buildings all over
the empire and were distributed to deserving officials as a mark of imperial favour, for instance by way of thanks for contributing their libraries to the great imperial bibliographic project. Subsequent series were drawn and engraved in China by Chinese artists and craftsmen, who may have learned or relearned the art from the Jesuits. In whatever form, all the war illustrations must have been imaginary versions drawn from eyewitness descriptions, since court artists cannot personally have observed all these far-off battles.

Not all the later series contained as many as sixteen paintings, possibly because not all the wars so commemorated ranked among the ten great victories. They covered the following wars: the suppression of a Muslim uprising at Wushi in 1765; the defeat of the Two Jinchuan in 1776; the conclusion of wars in Vietnam (1788-89) and Taiwan (1787-88); victories against the Gurkhas in Nepal (1792), against the Miao aborigines in Yunnan and Hunan in the 1790s, and against the Central Asian leader Jahangir in the 1820s; and, finally, the bitter Muslim wars of the late nineteenth century. The originals of the paintings are located in the Palace Museum, Beijing; the copper-engravings can be found all over the world.

The hall where the original war illustrations were hung, the Zhi Guang Ge, was an old pavilion that had originally been used for parades, archery review and the like. The emperor had it restored in 1760 expressly for the purpose of displaying military art and trophies and for receiving tributaries. Official foreign visitors are still received there today. It overlooks a drill ground located on the west bank of the central lake in Xi Yuan, immediately to the West of the Forbidden City, in what is now the sealed-off government headquarters known as Zhongnanhai.

In addition to the sets of war illustrations, the Zhi Guang Ge housed another series of paintings commemorating war: portraits of meritorious officials (jiaochen xiang). After the Xinjiang wars, a series of one hundred was made. They were divided into two groups of fifty, upper and lower. The emperor personally wrote eulogies on the upper fifty, while three senior officials—Yu Minzhong, Liu Tongxun, and Liu Lun—did them on the lower fifty. Each eulogy appeared in both Chinese and Manchu.

At the head of the hundred meritorious officials thus honoured after the Xinjiang was the senior official Fuheng, also credited with the first Jinchuan victory in the 1740s after earlier commanders had been dramatically executed in front of the troops. Notably, Fuheng had not been personally involved in the fighting in Xinjiang but he had been almost alone in supporting the emperor’s decision to pursue his goals in Central Asia. Qianlong’s eulogy on Fuheng’s portrait, which is now in a private collection in the United States, reads as follows:

Of noble descent, a distinguished public servant
Your sorrow and joy are linked with the country’s;
Qianlong's gratitude indicates that even in an imperial system there was some scope for expressing disagreement with imperial policy. That many of his advisers opposed the Xinjiang venture on grounds of expense is clear from a number of other comments, and made even sweeter the post-war justifications of the decision to pursue the campaign to the end.\textsuperscript{49} Merit, in other words, was susceptible of definition in accordance with the emperor's sometimes quite subjective judgment.

The division between the upper and lower fifty was made on the basis of merit and shows no distinction between civil and military officials, thus reinforcing the quest to reward equally any action that contributed to military victory and make the two branches of the bureaucracy more nearly equal. As with the war illustrations, after subsequent wars further series of portraits of this kind were made: one hundred following the second Jinchuan war, forty following the Taiwan war and thirty for the Gurkha wars. Agui and Hailancha, leading generals in several of the emperor's ten great campaigns, each had their portraits hung in the Zi Guang Ge no less than four times, a distinction rare enough to have been recorded in their respective biographies. Honouring selected generals, soldiers, and military administrators in this way formed part of a deliberate policy of rewards and punishments intended to encourage values of service and loyalty to the Qing cause. That policy also included a notable expansion in the award of gifts and hereditary titles to victorious generals and in the meting out of severe punishment to those whose dedication or success rate were found wanting, as in the case of the two top commanders executed during the first Jinchuan war.\textsuperscript{50} It was a policy that, as so often, was not introduced by Qianlong but built and elaborated on early practice.

Similarly, and as in the case of the war illustrations, there was a venerable precedent for portraits of meritorious officials. In the latter part of the first century the Han emperor Mingdi (58-75) had commissioned a set of twenty-eight while in the seventh century Emperor Taizong of the Tang—Qianlong's model again—had ordered a set of twenty-four painted by court artist Yan Liben for the Lingyan Hall and later engraved on steles.\textsuperscript{51} Evidence suggests that the Qianlong portraits closely adhered to tradition in format, composition, and content, but on the whole the eighteenth-century portraits are somewhat more lively than the earlier ones and involve the melding of two painting techniques, Chinese and Western. Generally, the hundred Xinjiang portraits show individual figures either frontally
or in three-quarters profile, wearing ceremonial robes or military uniforms and standing somewhat woodenly in front of a neutral background.

The portrait sets were executed in triplicate. One set, in ink and colour on silk, hung in the Zhi Guang Ge, while two more sets, in the form of hanging scrolls and handscrolls done on the very finest Anhui paper, were installed in the halls and pavilions of the imperial palace complex. This nonetheless suggests that they had a relatively limited audience, but one can speculate that word of their existence may well have spread beyond the palace.

Castiglione and the other foreign artists who had produced the original war illustrations also were involved with Chinese court artists in the production of the portrait series. In addition they trained quite a few Chinese apprentices as portraitists; many artists collaborated in this project, as in many of the commemorative paintings, in this case not least because once the wars were over Qianlong wanted the portraits completed more or less immediately, that is within four to five months. Such haste was due to the fact that once the army returned the authorities planned to hold the celebratory banquet at the Zhi Guang Ge as part of the series of ritually authorized triumphal events, and the portraits just had to be done in time. These portraits were dispersed at the time of the Boxer uprising in 1900-01. Some are in private western collections; others are located in museums around the world, including what is the only one known to be still in China, located at the Tianjin Municipal Museum. Other extant portraits from these series continue to surface intermittently on the international art market today.52

Behind the Zhi Guang Ge stood the Wu Cheng Dian, the Hall of Military Achievements. This hall seems to have played a less prominent role in war commemoration than the Zhi Guang Ge. In its vicinity, however, were displayed further steleae, engraved with several hundred of Qianlong’s military compositions: this was probably the major collection in stone of those writings. At the Wu Cheng Dian, too, were exhibited various war trophies, such as the silver sutra case of Amursana, turncoat and Qing archenemy of the Xinjiang wars, and some captured weapons, and so on. Captured weapons may have been a plentiful commodity immediately after the wars were over. One Jesuit missionary sent a finely worked jeweled dagger, allegedly a trophy from the Jinchuan armies, to his patron, minister of state Henri Bertin, in France. Indeed, the missionaries at Qianlong’s court provided one avenue along which imperial propaganda traveled effortlessly, for correspondents in the French government repeatedly sought out information about the Chinese military from their countrymen in Beijing. Whether missionaries’ striking degree of access to that information was the consequence of a deliberate policy on the part of the Qing emperors, can only be guessed at.53