

A Study on the ‘Imperial Portraits’ of Qianlong in his *First Anthology of Imperial Poetry*

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Abstract

Each of Emperor Qianlong’s Anthologies of Imperial Poetry begins routinely with an “Imperial Portrait” of himself made at different times. The case of such portrait in his first anthology is studied in this paper to explore the possible origin and application of this kind of small portraits of Qianlong. Among the many of Qianlong’s portraits of different sizes surviving to the present day are some related to political or religious rituals featuring the emperor in his formal court attire, inspecting the troops or during imperial inspection tour to the south and others featuring Qianlong in his leisure time such as in the *Double Portrait*. The portraits of Qianlong in his *Anthologies of Imperial Poetry* in the National Palace Museum collection are all small half-length portraits. They have long been regarded among the most realistic and reliable images of Qianlong at his different ages. Anthologies beginning with the author's portraits are not rare but most often subsequently added by editors or publishers. Qianlong should have been the first author who specifically demanded his small portraits to be put on the first pages of his own anthologies of poetry as the compilation was apparently under his own supervision. The portrait in the *First Anthology of Imperial Poetry* is the beginning of this tradition. The techniques employed in this portrait indicated the involvement of Giuseppe Castiglione, or Lang Shining. The emperor in his casual clothes is portrayed half-length in a circle frame on the centre of the page. The frame is in an abstract pale blue. The emergence of this format is likely associated with the Western books and portrait miniatures brought into the court. Apart from the beginning of each of his *Anthologies of Imperial Poetry*, Emperor Qianlong also added similar small portraits in circle frame to his favourite books and objects. He once explained that he was “adding his portraits as a token of his sincere appreciation.” However, the small portraits at the beginning of each anthology seem to be more than a token of his sincere appreciation, they are added to give future readers a sense of history. The emperor seems to gaze at the beholders out of his realistically depicted portraits by Castiglione and other painters, making the posterior viewers feel as if seeing the emperor in person.

Key words: Qianlong emperor, Giuseppe Castiglione, portrait miniature