

A Comparative Study of Paintings Showing Birthday Celebrations of Emperor Kangxi and Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Period

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Abstract

Among the eleven emperors of the Qing Dynasty (1636-1911), Emperors Kangxi (b.1654; r.1662-1722) and Qianlong (1711-1799; r.1736-1795) were the most successful rulers. These two emperors share in common certain achievement in three aspects: enjoying a long life over sixty years, being on the throne for at least six decades, and bring a long-term peace and prosperity to the empire. To show their respect, their sovereign arranged a sumptuous activities to celebrate their birthdays, respectively, in the Spring of 1713 for the sixtieth birthday of Emperor Kangxi, and in the Autumn of 1790 for the eightieth birthday of Emperor Qianlong.

After the special event, Emperor Kangxi ordered his officials to compile a book, entitled *Wanshou Shengdian* (Records of the Magnificent Celebration for Emperor Kangxi's Sixtieth Birthday), which includes a set of woodblock prints showing the event, known as *Wanshou tu*. Modeled on Emperor Kangxi's case, Emperor Qianlong commanded his officials do the same thing, and thus, compiled a book, entitled *Baxun Wnshou Shengdian* (Records of the Magnificent Celebration for Emperor Qianlong's Eightieth Birthday), which also contains a set of woodblock prints showing the event, known as *Baxun Wanshou tu*.

A comparative study, this paper deals with problems in the following aspects: the condition of the compilation of the books and the execution of the paintings; analyses of the compositional principles of the paintings; and interpretation of the iconographical meanings and historical significance of the paintings mentioned above.

Keywords: Emperor Kangxi's Birthday Celebration, Emperor Qianlong's Birthday Celebration, *Wanshou shendian*, *Baxun wanshou shengdian*, *Wanshou tu*, Qing court painting