

## **Topographical Changes and River Construction Projects in the Qingkou Area During the Qianlong Era: A Study on Illustrations of River Management in the National Palace Museum Collection**

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### **Abstract**

The management of the Yellow River, with its changeable course and tendency to burst its banks, has long been a major government concern of Chinese dynasties over the ages. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the north depended on the Grand Canal for the transport of grain from the south. However, the intersection of the canal with the Yellow River in the Huai'an-Qingkou area in Jiangsu made shipments on the canal to the north heavily dependent on Yellow River conditions. Flooding of the canal by river water would cause blockage, meaning that managing the Yellow River was essential to the flow of goods on the canal. In the early Kangxi reign in the Qing dynasty, Yang Fangxing, General Supervisor of Rivers and Canals, pointed out that "managing the river meant managing the canal." This shows that government conservation of the river not only could prevent flooding but also maintain the local economy. Even more important was ensuring a stable supply of national revenue to the capital. For this reason, the Qing government invested a great amount of human and financial resources on closing dikes, their repair and protection being the key to achieving this goal.

In the archives of the Grand Council in the collection of the National Palace Museum are paintings prepared by officials in charge of waterways that describe the repairs and construction projects done on them. The greatest number of these illustrations comes from the eighteenth century under the Qianlong emperor, providing scholars with a history of topographical changes for studying the waterways and the policies for their management adopted by central and local governments at the time. This study searches for clues in ten illustrations related to construction projects at the confluence of the Yellow and Huai Rivers at Qingkou. Judging from the period of painting for these illustrations, the memorials prepared by officials, and the contents

of the imperial rescripts on them, they can be used to describe the relationship between topographical changes to the waterways and the formation of policies for projects dealing with the Grand Canal, Huai River, and Yellow River in the Huai'an-Qingkou area of Jiangsu.

**Keywords:** Qianlong era, Jiangsu, Huai'an, Qingkou, confluence of the Yellow River at Qingkou, archives of the Grand Council, illustrations of river construction

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)