

The Implications of the Qing Qianlong Emperor's Manufacture of Metal Sacrificial Utensils

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Abstract

The governing strategy of the Qing Empire was of a multi-ethnic nature, including the Confucian culture of the Han Chinese, the Buddhist culture of Tibetans and Mongolians, and the preservation of Manchurian culture. This strategy had grown to full bloom during the Qianlong reign. Provincial officials were still in charge of budgeting for sacrificial utensils during the early Qianlong reign, but the Emperor was inclined that the Imperial Court should standardise the specifications and styles of these utensils. To begin with, the Ministry of Rites and the Grand Secretariat drew up the specifications and styles for sacrificial utensils. Prince Zhuang Yunlu was instructed to execute the plan, and the objects were manufactured by technicians in the Casting Department of the Imperial Workshop. These sacrificial utensils served as the models for drawings in the *Huangchao liqi tushi*. Although the Qianlong Emperor emphasised Manchurian heritage, sacrificial utensils of Confucian style were used at *Taimiao and Fengxian dian*. In the *Yuzhi zengding qing wenjian* published in 1771, *zeng, jia, le, jue, fu, gui, deng, xing, dou* and *zun* were added. It shows the gradual Confucian influence of ancestor worship at the Qing Court.

Meanwhile, the Emperor also published *Qinding Manzhou jishen jitian dianli*, presenting the materials and categories of sacrificial utensils in text as well as diagrams, such as for silver tea buckets, silver plates, silver dishes, silver spoons, and silver chopsticks. The sacrifices offered were Manchurian specialties--the seeds of perilla, honey, butter, and the Amur grape. The utensils and sacrifices in the book were different from those of the Confucian tradition, and the purpose of the publication was to assert Manchurian heritage. It was the tradition of the Imperial Court to manufacture cutlery made with various formulas of silver and gold according to its users' status. The cutlery would serve as sacrificial utensils after the death of its owner. The Qianlong Emperor reclaimed the sacrificial utensils made of silver and gold from the Three Imperial Tombs of Shengjing and the Eastern and Western Qing Tombs to reduce the percentage of gold in the sacrificial utensils of the Emperors and Empresses. He ordered new sacrificial utensils to be made according to the ranking of the deceased. The Qing Empire adopted a multi-ethnic ruling strategy; a hierarchical political order was established following the

Confucian culture, while Manchurian heritage was maintained. The manufacture of metal sacrificial utensils shows that the Qianlong Emperor reserved silverware, gold ware, and bronze ware for those of higher ranks, and porcelain for those of lower status. In this way, 30,000 taels of gold was reclaimed from the tombs. This article investigates the altars of the Emperor to address the recent debate on whether the Qing Empire aimed at sinicisation or Manchurian rule, and demonstrates the merger and differences between Manchurian and Han Chinese cultures.

Keywords: *Huangchao liqi tushi*, sacrificial utensil, sinicisation, Manchurian heritage, cultural fusion