

THE INTERPRETATION OF CHINESE EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI'S IMAGE IN THE PORTRAITS OF AMERICAN ARTISTS

ANI MARGARYAN (Nanjing, People's Republic of China)*

The Chinese themes in Early American art have long been obscured under the veil of Japonisme, Aesthetic movement, boundary-pushing modernism and more significantly because of the political circumstances - decline of China as an empire and complicated Chinese-American interconnections. One of the favoured theme of American academism at the period of the late 19th- early 20th centuries were genre scenes, street scenes, *portrait d'intérieur*¹, portraits, still life works related to China and Chinatowns. Nonetheless, the American press through the imagery created by illustrators and caricaturists was largely involved in interpretations of Western encounters with Chinese culture from the highlighted negative light, either being deeply affected by anti-Chinese flows or fuelling those xenophobic moods. Consequently, a few American artists featured Chinese people and Chinese settings from the perspective of admiration of their “otherness”. Only two American artists- Katherine A. Carl and Hubert Vos, succeeded to pave their career path to the Chinese court, enriching American arts of the early 1900s with the unprecedented depictions of high rank Chinese and the scandalously renowned empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) in the positive light of fascination. A number of publications have viewed and examined those portraits from the angle of "political self-fashioning", but our research is another academic attempt to place those oil paintings in the context of China-related subject matter and its extension in the rising American art of the previous century, stressing their artistic value, function and their relations to the intended audiences.

Key words – Dowager Cixi, Qing dynasty, Katherine A. Carl, Hubert Vos, USA, anti-Chinese propaganda, imperial portrait.

Introductory

The first Chinese people set to the United States supposedly in the period of 1849 to 1855. This time corresponds to the most profitable years of the California Golden Rush. The largest Chinese enclave outside Asia- San Francisco Chinatown, established in the year 1848, became the place where not only growing

* PhD candidate (ABD), Institute of Arts, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (NAS RA), PhD candidate (ABD), Fine Arts Department, Nanjing Normal University, People's Republic of China, Lecturer in the subject of Chinese-American cultural relations and interactions at Nanjing Normal University, People's Republic of China, animargaryan1962@gmail.com. The article has been delivered on 02.09.2021, reviewed on 08.09.2021, accepted for publication on 29.11.2021.

¹ The *portrait d'intérieur* or interior portrait, a pictorial genre that appeared in Europe at the end of the 17th century, reached its apogee in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century. It presents detailed compositions of uninhabited domestic or public interiors; the majority of those works are watercolours. See **Charlotte Gere**, *L'époque et son style, la décoration intérieure au XIXe siècle*, Flammarion, Paris, 1989, p. 12.

Chinese population in America continued to retain their customs, language and culture, but American artists could find fresh exotic subjects for their oeuvre.

At the end of the 19th century, the art, beyond aesthetics, had also become a powerful tool to feed a negative apparition towards Asian residents of the United States, serving the interests and ambitions of certain political aspirations. A great number of notorious caricatures, political cartoons, and illustrations for magazines explicitly conveyed the ethnic image of the Chinese, either as a potential threat for the local "white workers", capable to steal their job opportunities and property², summarised under the term "yellow peril"³ or ugly black collars labeled "coolies", with the lowest social status, physically distorted, deserved to be mocked at⁴, and finally in genre scenes of gambling⁵ and opium-smoking⁶. This discriminative course of the printed production was undertaken by other art disciplines as well: an unglazed porcelain figure group, made around the 1880s in New York, conveys negative connotations regarding the Chinese, executing the Chinese figure fallen, defeated and inferior to Western ones⁷.

The evolution of these racist art samples indicated the increase of anti-Asian sentiments all over America. In this context, it is important to mention the Wyoming massacre⁸. Even the murder of innocent Chinese people were justified in the American weekly magazines through visual facilities of illustrative art and

² See **George Frederick Keller**, 1846-circa 1927 (Creator), 1881-11-11, 24.5x34.5 cm, 1 loose sheet, E.C. MacFarlane & Co. In the cartoon, a statue of a Chinese immigrant man, representing the Statue of Liberty, wears tattered clothing and holds a torch from which six beams of light emanate. The words "filth," "immorality," "diseases," "ruin to," "white," and "labor" are written in the beams of light. See also *The Coming Man*. *The Wasp*, 20 May 1881, in Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese*, p. 91.

³ The term "*Yellow Peril*" refers to Western fears that Asians, in particular the Chinese, would invade their lands and disrupt Western values, such as democracy, Christianity, and technological innovation, See Frewen, Moreton. "*The Century and Silver. Our Exchanges and the Yellow Peril.*" *The North American Review*, vol. 189, no. 641, 1909, pp. 539-553, p. 542.

⁴ See *Pacific Chivalry*, Harper's Weekly, 7 August 1869 caricature. Unknown terror awaits this Chinese figure as he attempts to flee from a white aggressor. The Chinese man is startled by his capture. His fearful expression further distorted by the pulling from the back of his scalp. His sun hat, the *douli*, has fallen to the ground and his hands are open in a defensive posture, though the threat has come from behind.

⁵ Lithographer: Butler (active ca. 1850), *Chinese life: Dupont Street [San Francisco, California]*, Fishbourne & Company, 1850s, UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material, print on paper mounted on paper: pen lithograph 20.7x27.5 cm., sheet.

⁶ See *Two Chinese opium smokers reclining in a booth watched by a woman with bound feet*, wood-engraving, late 19th century, Wellcome Library no. 25059i.

⁷ Ceramics, late-1800s, United States: New York, Brooklyn, Greenpoint, National Museum of American History, https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_575396

⁸ On September 2, 1885, 150 American "white" miners in Rock Springs, Wyoming, brutally attacked their Chinese coworkers, killing 28, wounding 15 others and driving several hundred more out of town.

satire⁹. Widely blamed for all sorts of societal ills, the Chinese were also attacked by some national politicians who popularised strident slogans like “The Chinese Must Go”, and had helped passing the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act¹⁰. In this climate of racial hatred, art propagandising violence against Chinese residents became all too common. “The Chinese Must Go” propaganda was so widely-recognised, that it was soon adopted by “Magie Washer” advertising campaign, featuring Chinese people as fearful and helpless beings, being rudely “washed off” from America by Uncle Sam¹¹.

Against the above-described context, even the considerable contribution of the Chinese workers to the Transcontinental Railroad, constructed between 1863 and 1869 that linked America from the East to West, was ignored¹².

Nevertheless, there were still turn-of-the-century artists and members of sketching clubs that loved to stroll in Chinatown streets and capture Chinese people in their colourful folk costumes and intricately decorated interiors, among them Henry Alexander (1860–1894), John Herbert Evelyn Partington (1843–1899), Guy Rose (1867–1925), Nelson A. Primus (1842–1916), Helen Hyde (1868–1919) and others. The 1880s oil paintings of Theodore Wores, Munich-trained Californian artist, might be considered as an enlightening crack in the anti-Chinese wall¹³. The paintings were detailed executions of Chinatown street scenes or characteristic

⁹ See a cartoon drawn by Thomas Nast in 1885 that depicts the massacre in Rock Springs. From the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. As armed whites slaughter Chinese in the background A 'Satirical Chinese Diplomatist' says, 'There's no doubt of the United States being at the head of enlightened nations!' See the cover of *Puck Magazine*, September 16, 1885. Illustration shows Uncle Sam preparing a list of places in China where “Americans [have been] killed by Chinese” and a Chinese man preparing a list of places in America where “Chinese [have been] killed by Americans” including the latest incident in “Wyoming Territory”, illustrated by Frederick Burr Opper (1857–1937), one of the pioneers of American newspaper comic strips.

¹⁰ The US President Chester A. Arthur signed it into law on May 6, 1882, suspended Chinese immigration for ten years and declared Chinese immigrants eligible for naturalisation. See, John Soennichsen, *The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882*, Santa Barbara, California, 2011, p. 77.

¹¹ See The magic washer, manufactured by Geo. Dee, Dixon, Illinois. "The Chinese must go" cartoon, Shober & Carqueville Lith Co., c1886. lithograph, color; sheet 71x52 cm. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, 93500013. It refers both to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and also to the "Magic Washer." The actual purpose of the poster was to promote the "George Dee Magic Washer," which the machine's manufacturers clearly hoped would displace Chinese laundry operators.

¹² Roughly 15.000 Chinese workers had to face dangerous work conditions – accidental explosions, snow, and rock avalanches, which killed hundreds of workers, yet they appeared to be rather additional, secondary motifs of engravings and illustrations (recognised solely by their conical straw hats and traditional hairstyle “queue”), that featured the construction of the railroad as a pure American achievement. See *Across the Continent. The snow sheds on the Central Pacific Railroad in the Sierra Nevada Mountains*. From a sketch by Joesph Becker, originally printed in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Vol. 29, February 6, 1870, p. 346.

¹³ **Ani Margaryan**, *Chinese Themes in Early American Art*, Art Storia, September 2020, <https://www.artstoriagalleria.com/chinese-themes-early-american-art>

Chinese interiors with Chinese art objects, and figures in national costumes, portraits of Chinese women and children, represented with such a purity and esteem as if aiming to evoke the political and social dialogue confronting anti-immigration and intolerance. His view of Chinese culture as a unique inspiring subject is comparable to the ethnographic and historical significance of Arnold Genthe's photography, who managed to capture Chinatown characters before the 1906 earthquake. Two other artists whom Wores knew personally, had similar views and perspectives to his, Paul Frenzeny (1840s–1902) and Jules Tavernier (1844–1889), and in their turn created joint sketches on Chinatown of San Francisco for “Harper’s Weekly” 1877 issue.

However, very few American artists succeeded to get acquainted with the high rank Chinese related to the Qing court. Even Edward Meyer Kern (1822/1823–1863), taking part in the American expeditions to the East Asia, left the legacy of Chinese landscapes and several portraits of Chinese merchants only¹⁴. Two American artists have been recorded to the present who made a name through portraying the Qing Empress, who unofficially ruled the country during the decadence period in the Chinese history.

Katharine Augusta Carl - the first American artist who portrayed Dowager Cixi

Katharine A. Carl (1865–1938) (**Picture 1**), born in New Orleans, has studied art at the Tennessee State Female College, and continued her artistic education at the Académie Julian under the prolific academic painter William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905), Tony Robert-Fleury (1837–1911), known primarily for his historical genre works, and the adherent of academism and Orientalism, portrait painter Gustave Courtois (1852–1923). Little is known about Carl's early career: her paintings have been exhibited at Paris Salon, later her works were displayed at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago -both in so-called Fine Arts Palace and in the Women's Building¹⁵.

Possessing herself as a portraitist and working by commissions of the aristocratic clientele, including Algerian and Egyptian royals, as well as American upper classes, paved her the way to the Chinese court. Nonetheless, neither Carl's skills, nor her fame (she was a lesser-known artist at the time) played role in gaining this significant commission. Her brother must have had a certain impact on that process: he was an American government official, operating in the high classes in China, who had previously arranged Katharine's visit to Shanghai, and was familiar with the wife of the U.S. minister to China, at the suggestion of whom Katharine was selected to portray the last powerful empress of Qing

¹⁴ See Edward Meyer Kern (American, 1823–1863), *Portrait of Hoqua (Tea Merchant)*, February 1855, brush and gray wash on paper, sheet: 20.1x15.3 cm (7 15/16x6 in.), The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 60.887.

¹⁵ **David Shavit**, *The United States in Asia: A Historical Dictionary*. Greenwood Publishing Group; 1 January 1990, p. 81.

dynasty- Dowager Cixi (慈禧太后, also called *Tz'u-Hsi*; 1835–1908), continuing the lineage of the few Western artists who were fortunate to capture the female royals of the celestial empire¹⁶.

The solid-sixteen feet tall in an ornate camphor-wood frame, painted in 1903 (**Picture 2**), the portrait made its way to the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904 before the Dowager Cixi presented the picture as a state gift to President Theodore Roosevelt, who promptly deposited it at the Smithsonian Institution¹⁷.

When the painting was accomplished, it had been placed in an Eastern-style, carved wood frame, and photographed a number of times by a young Manchu amateur photographer¹⁸. Soon the canvas was transported from Beijing to Tianjin by train, in an elaborately decorated and specially commissioned carriage, from Tianjin to Shanghai by boat, and from Shanghai to San Francisco by a Pacific Mail steamer¹⁹. The treatment this object received even before the time it had reached its intended viewers, gives a proper insight to its value as a tool of the East-West, more precisely Chinese-American communications at the time. Since the time it appeared as an idea, this painting has already been destined to become a visualisation of Dowager's diplomacy towards the West, also a mutual advertising campaign both for the Empress and the artist herself. And the fact that it is portrayed by precisely the American woman for the American exhibition, points the shifted strategy of the empress to build better relations exactly with the United States²⁰.

The mentioned circumstances move this work closer to the group of artworks that were celebrated and appreciated rather as turning points in the artist's lifetime, by their original context, intriguing stories of their creation, contradictory reactions of intended audiences, over their artistic properties,

¹⁶ Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Jesuit brother-missionary in China, is regarded as a pioneer artist in this sense, having been executed portrait of the Empress Xiao Xian (Fucha) (1736, The Palace Museum, Beijing). The artist was also thought to be one of the creators of the imperial portrait of the Dowager Empress Xiao Zhuang (c. 1750, The Palace Museum, Beijing). See also "Empress Xiaoxian portrait" by German-Bohemian Jesuit missionary and painter Ignatius Sichelbarth (1708–1780) and Yi Lantai (act. ca. 1748–86) and possibly Wang Ruxue (act. 18th century). China, Qianlong period, 1777, with repainting possibly 19th century. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk. Peabody Essex Museum (PEM), gift of Mrs. Elizabeth Sturgis Hinds, 1956, E33619.

¹⁷ Susan Delson, *At Museums, a Vanished Chinese Realm of Female Power*, *The Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 2018.

¹⁸ Xunling (1874-1943), *The photograph of a portrait of the Empress Dowager painted by Katharine Carl (1865-1938)*, glass negative, Beijing (China), Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, FSA A.13 SC-GR-247.

¹⁹ See "*Katharine Carl's portrait of the Empress Dowager Cixi leaving Beijing on a train*", 1904, Paper, Black and white photograph, Cadbury Research Library (Special Collections), University of Birmingham, Maxwell Family Mx04-070, © 2014 University of Birmingham.

²⁰ The article illustration in the September 24, 1905 issue of *The New York Herald* coupled Carl's imposing portrait with the visit to China of the American President Roosevelt's daughter Alice.

composition and manner. After all, the circumstance that it was the study-from-life portrait of a female royal of the East created by a female artist from the West, marked as one of the China-inspired pioneering work in the American history of oil painting, left behind the artistic merits and visual characteristics of this work. Although this artwork was not supposed for the Chinese eyes, but even for the Asian societies this occasion itself was a revolutionary step, as only privileged Western women were allowed to enter the Forbidden city.

Carl's artwork was meant to have the qualities of boldly accentuated propagandistic messages to its targeted audience- the West, - first and foremost to showcase an idealised, polished and stereotyped appearance of the Eastern female ruler, as the allegory "Mother of the State". Consequently, the thoroughly outlined function of this artwork was emphasised either, that is to rehabilitate Dowager's public image in the West that was heavily vilified as the aftermath of her possible support to the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901)²¹. Her image was demonised in the way reminiscent of the characters of Chinese immigrants, represented in the Western, including the American press: with ugly curvature, physical contortions, either as a "tyrant jester"²² or an "old witch" while relishing murdering her own people²³(**Picture 3**) and closing foreigners in cages.

Being more concise, Carl's portrait was given one of the leading role within the culmination of the performance to oppose the existing Western conceptions and to represent Cixi as a progressive woman, who were capable to imply Western means to commune with the West. Taking this fact into consideration, Carl's portrait of Cixi could be better understood and analysed within the framework of the historical context regarding Chinese empress's frequent parties for foreign delegations, her novel obsession of being photographed²⁴ and then sharing those pictures with the foreign royals, as well as exchanging extravagant gifts with them.

The formal qualities and compositional arrangements thereby were supposed to serve the mentioned intentions to the furthest extent, as it used to happen with

²¹ See Charles Lucien Léandre, S.M. *L'Impératrice Douairière de Chine*, front cover of *Le Rire*, 14 July 1900. Widener Library, Harvard College Library. the empress is shown hunched behind a fan, her long thumbnail pointing upward like a claw. In her left hand, she holds a bloodied knife, and several decapitated heads and corpses are impaled on the pike behind her.

²² See **Kikeriki**, No. 97 June 12, 1900 (Austria); caption "This good empress of China carefully guards in the innermost part of the palace the representatives of the Powers. So! what does that mean?"

²³ See *Atlanta Constitution*, June, 1900 (United States), caption "This frowning, begowned old lady is an interesting feature of the Boxer' troubles. She bears a strong resemblance to Mrs. Nack, the New York murderess, and if gossip that has floated in from the Orient is reliable, she is aiding in wholesale slaughter by secretly encouraging the present uprising in China".

²⁴ Xunling (1874–1943), the son of Lady Yu Geng, senior lady-in-waiting to the empress, was allowed to take photographs of the empress dowager during the period 1903 to 1905; a number of these are in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, and the Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian has 44 photo-negatives. Several of them have been included in the album of Firmin Laribe (1855-1942), French traveller and a military officer active in Beijing around the years 1904 and 1910.

the commissioned royal portraiture throughout global history. The mentioned occasions make it hard to separate the artistic decisions and creative expressions of the artist herself conveyed within her work, from the personal preferences and aesthetic vision of the patroness. By the 1900s Cixi already had an experience of posing for the imperial artists: The Palace Museum in Beijing hosts the least ten portraits of the Empress- as a concubine, or accompanied by her son, in festive clothes or in daily garbs enjoying her time in the palace gardens. The same preparations requested for the Chinese portraits were supposedly arranged for the American artist's visit. The place, surroundings with the abundance of objets d'art, the protagonist's garments, and accessories were carefully selected by the royal and her advisors as marks of her identity, status, and power, that furthermore claim her ethnicity and its enduring traditions, also for making an impression both on the artist and the audiences.

Not arguing the flair of politicisation and image-reshaping functionality of this artwork, we tend to look at it also through the prism of "autonomy of the art", as an artistic creation, leaving aside the peculiar contextual traits of the latter.

The symmetrical composition, strongly balanced in terms of distribution of warm yellows and red spots protruding due to the gloomy greens and sable-browns, lacks the light-and-shadow modelling and depth of space for the favour of decorativeness²⁵. The queen is the apparent focal point in the centralised composition, still in her position and in the direct eye-contact with the spectator. Anyway, our eyes draw slowly to the designs of in-detailed depicted, lavishly brocaded gown, the exuberance of accessories as combinations of pearls, jewels, precious and semi-precious stones, matched with the finest silk fabrics.

This kind of treatment of the model was not innovative in the Western art: it falls under the category of "official or formal portraiture" with the subject matter - the ruler in her representative and self-confident posture, commissioned by the protagonist herself either for reaffirming her legitimacy with her high-rank straightforward indexes serving as a splendour and ostentatious display of her power and taste. But at the same time the attributes, such as the imperial *minghuang* robe²⁶ with longevity characters and symbols²⁷, sumptuous Manchu

²⁵ The flat surfaces and ornamental essence of this composition could be evoked by the waves of Orientalism in the Western academic art of the time, or with the keenness of the artist to reference the Chinese elaborate designs and patterns.

²⁶ Most likely it is the same garb Cixi had while being photographed with Sarah Pike Conger (born c.1843-?), wife of Edwin Hurd Conger, American Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to Beijing. See Xunling (1874-1943), *The Empress Dowager Cixi with foreign envoys' wives in Leshoutang, Summer Palace, Beijing, 1903-1905*, housed at Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1 Glass plate negative (glass plate negative 1,24.1x17.8 cm.(9.5x7 in.)), FSA A.13 SC-GR-249.

²⁷ The Chinese ideograph shòu (壽), implemented as an underlined motif in the background and on her imperial robe, found on Chinese textiles, furniture, ceramics, and jewellery throughout centuries, was depicted, carved, and embroidered as either a sole pattern or surrounded by floral, vegetative ornaments, standing for good fortune.

headdress²⁸, jade bracelets and amulets, gold filigreed fingernail covers or guards²⁹, three double-pearl earrings, that only Qing empresses could wear, elongated, elaborate pearl-necklace, covering the whole space from the collar to the waist³⁰, finally, inscriptions in Chinese marking her persona and incorporated into the composition³¹, as well as the hall furnishing form the visual vocabulary with the concepts the vast ranges of Chinese audience of the time might have easily decoded: for the Western public those elements were signs of exoticism, pleasing their sight. Dowager Cixi thereby intended to highlight her "otherness" from the positive light in the eyes of the Western beholder.

It is worth mentioning that in comparison with the accurately outlined and emphasised pearls, bolded longevity characters in golden shades, and luminous face of the figure, other details, such as floral motifs of the dress and the darkened throne itself seem to be blurred and lightly generalised: we thereby concede that was done in order to increase the visibility of the mentioned compositional details directly connected with her position and nationality.

In addition, the static frontalism and meticulous execution of the auspicious details speak of channeling the Chinese ancestor portraits³² and imperial portraits. However, the blank settings characteristic for the ancestral depictions, are replaced with the richly-ornamented Chinese screen that covers the whole of the background. It is executed more like an abstract backdrop, where its patterns- imaginary phoenixes, seem less symbols of her kingship, but the indicatives of paradise- the way China was at large comprehended in the Western minds since the birth of Chinoiserie³³. The female artist with the touch

²⁸ Cixi is wearing a stylized and more elaborate version of "Manchu women headdress" that is called 兩把头. With her increasing status, Cixi needed to wear more and more jewellery in her hair. But her own hair was soft and thin due to hair loss. As small hair buns could not hold heavy jewellery, thus she invented 大拉翅 "Da La Chi", a wing-like headdress made of a wireframe and cloth base, and covered with black satin or velvet. The "Da La Chi" soon became popular among Manchu court ladies and turned into an icon of oriental charm in the eyes of Western artists.

²⁹ Late Qing female royals took great care to emphasise their nails, as a sign of their ability to rely on servants and not performing manual tasks by themselves.

³⁰ Pearls were said to be of auspicious importance for Dowager Cixi. The empress believed that exactly the pearls had cured her illness. From then on she was infatuated with pearls and even used to hold a large pearl in her hand to help her calm down and make important political decisions. The archeologists have calculated about 23,540 pearls on the clothes and bedding of Cixi's body.

³¹ 大清国慈禧皇太后, Empress Dowager Cixi of the Qing Dynasty.

³² See Stuart, Jan, and Evelyn Sakakida Rawski. *Worshiping the Ancestors: Chinese Commemorative Portraits*. Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, 2001.

³³ Phoenixes were embroidered on the robes because the mythical bird was the emblem of the empress, the sovereign of the female realm of the entire empire. Carl presumably employed this symbol multiple times all over her composition, inking its analogy to the female monarch's figure, but interestingly presented Cixi's robe without the phoenix patterns: it's covered solely with irises and peonies, intensifying the emotional and affectionate side of the image.

of her brush has brought the flock of those heavenly birds to life: in her canvas this epitomes of the female imperial power are interpreted as if echoing and recalling each other in their released flight, contrasting with the staticism of the empress's figure. Another Western approach is the correct foreshortening of the throne and the massive porcelain jars, that flank the figure of Cixi from the both sides and are slightly reflected on the floor surface, bringing the sense of volume to the composition.

The enthroned empress, delicately resting her arm on the cushion, is cunningly featured not as “the woman behind the imperial curtain” or an “iron-fisted ruler”, but more from the artist's admiring point of view, as a personification of an Eastern fairy-tale queen character, enchanting and tender. Possibly the accentuated feminine essence of the protagonist paired with the decorative blooming background served as the visual evidence to classify the work as a canvas in “Art Nouveau style”³⁴, though we rather assume it is flavoured with some gentle inflexions of Symbolism.

We can't conclude from the above-mentioned notions, that this work belonging to the portrait genre, unveils the inner world and character of the figure. On the contrary, in that particular sense Cixi here remained distant and closed for the West. Even the second portrait by Carl, which she gifted to the Empress, where the sitter is depicted in relatively relaxed position, close-up viewpoint and with a light smile on her face, her psyche still has not been opened up to the audiences³⁵.

But the artist indeed painted her impression from that floating moment and the empress within the mood frozen in the framework of the exact moment. She has been accused in the Western press for sacrificing her artistic facilities for the sake of flattering Cixi, making an elderly, “dragon lady” look like a young and charming woman. In her book Carl complains that the Western newspapers have largely speculating her words and her role in the process of Dowager's image-making, stating, that “after she returned to America, she was constantly seeing in newspapers and hearing of statements ascribed to her which she never made. “Her Majesty was represented as having stood over me in threading attitudes, forcing me to represent her as a young and beautiful woman!”³⁶.

The artist scrupulously describes her time in the court and her encounter with Dowager Cixi, number of times pointing her “youthful appearance” or at the least the way she personally perceived the empress, “Had I not known she was nearing her sixty-ninth year, I should have thought her a well-preserved woman of forty. Being a widow, she used no cosmetics. Her face had the natural

³⁴ *Empresses of China's Forbidden City, 1644-1912*, exhibition catalogue, curated by Daisy Yiyou Wang and Jan Stuart, June 2019, Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

³⁵ The glass plate negative of the picture taken by Xunling (1874-1943) is housed at Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (FSA A.13 SC-GR-248), the portrait itself kept in the National Palace Museum, Beijing.

³⁶ **Katherine A. Carl**, *With the Empress Dowager*, New York, The Century co, 1905, Introductory, p. 26.

glow of health, and one could see that exquisite care and attention was bestowed upon everything concerning her toilet. Personal neatness and an excellent taste in the choice of becoming colours and ornaments enhanced this wonderfully youthful appearance and remarkable intelligence crowned all these physical qualities and made an unusually attractive personality³⁷”.

On the other hand, that soft smoothness of her skin and the facial expression, emanating the light could be the result of being influenced by her teachers, such as William-Adolphe Bouguereau, with his hallmark of loveable young female characters with exaggerated ivory texture of their skin³⁸.

Speaking of the other side of the medal, Carl mentions in her memoirs that the patroness was proposing certain directions during the creation process, considering the modelling, perspective and shading, and those circumstances have affected her work as a whole. The artist was presumably referencing Cixi's demand of avoiding shadows and making her face appear wrinkleless.

It's noteworthy that one of the photographic portrait of Cixi in the Palace Museum in Beijing was the source for the colorised, painted and gilded print to be sent to President Roosevelt³⁹(**Picture 4**), where the Empress looks young with the smooth skin either. In the early age of photographic enlargements, technical limitations impaired the quality of rescaled prints, with considerable loss of detail, clarity, and tonal range: in this instance it was used to advantage⁴⁰. Besides, the close-up detail of Cixi's left eye in the present photographic image shows fine details created with the brush. Painted details are strategically applied to redefine key features, including the chin and lower jaw outline, thereby creating a compelling illusion of youthfulness in the same way, Carls' portrait does. It is important to mention also the fact that Dowager Cixi was an amateur artist herself⁴¹, and we can't exclude that she was interfering with her own artistic taste and vision both in the creative process of her photographs and her portraits.

Thus, the historical evidence and comparative analysis speak of the patroness's initiative to sacrifice the artistic ideas to have a younger physiognomy,

³⁷ Katherine A. Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, New York, The Century co, 1905, pp. 19-20.

³⁸ ZAFRAN, ERIC M. "BOUGUEREAU IN BALTIMORE." *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum*, 70/71, 2012, pp. 93-100, p. 94.

³⁹ Xunling, 1874-1943, *The Empress Dowager Cixi 1905*, 北京慈禧慈禧太后勳齡, The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from 1905, Taft Mission to Asia, Gelatin silver print (image: 23x17 cm.), Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, FSA A2009.02 04

⁴⁰ David Hogg, *The Empress Dowager and The Camera: Photographing Cixi 1903-1904*, Visualising China, Massachusetts Institute of Technology © 2011 Visualising Cultures, http://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/empress_dowager/cx_essay01.html

⁴¹ One of the calligraphic works authored by Cixi herself is housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, See *Empress Dowager Cixi (Chinese, 1835-1908), Calligraphy: "Happiness"*, 18th-19th century, hanging scroll; ink on gold-flecked paper, 45x24 1/2 in. (114.3x 62.2 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 52.177.9

but the American artist's own words prove her individual perception of Cixi's image as gentle and youthful. Artworks in general could be to some extent "deposits" of social relationships between artist and his/her model, artist and his/her patron. This concept describes the best the essence of Carl's portrait; it perpetuates her personal connection with the empress by her means of artistic creativity. The otherworldly appearance and idealised face of Cixi do not reduce the aesthetic power of the present artwork. The negative perception of beautified Cixi's portrait expressed by certain circles in the West could be explained via the fact that their sight was used to grasp either naturalised royal portraiture with all the wealth of physical imperfections or portraits that objectify more than mere photographic representations, and are marked with the radical stamp of Modernism. It would be rather a misconception to apply Carl's portrait to any of the mentioned aesthetic streams.

And even if we approach her work as a pure materialisation of East-West cultural collision, it would also be hard to say which fraction is dominant. It's important to mention its definite stylistic resemblance to the mid-19th century oil and watercolour portraits of Chinese school, designated with the artists active mainly in Guangzhou, Macao and Hong Kong⁴², commissions by Westerners, where the radiating faces of foreigners are placed against bleak backgrounds, they seem motionless yet representative. However, those works in their turn bear apparent likeness to the earlier Western prototypes.

Hubert Vos- the Dutch-American artist who portrayed the Empress Cixi

Being a female and enjoying the favour of the royals through receiving commissions by one of the most extravagant and controversial rulers at the time, unachievable for the majority of Westerners, apart from its outcome, was an uncommon event, thus it arose jealousy both in American, and European artistic circles. According to a 1905 New York Times article, when Carl was appointed to paint the empress's portrait, the U.S. Embassy took "all the honours" and the other legations "turned through envy and jealousy the colour of jade and saffron"⁴³.

The Carl commission caused a small rivalry for her favour between the legations; the officials of the Dutch legation, feeling slighted that Holland, with its strong tradition in the practice of portraiture, had been superseded in this instance by the Americans, advocated for Hubert Vos (1855-1935), Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, who has been exhibited widely in Paris,

⁴² See Sunqua (Chinese, active 1830-1870) 1852, *Portrait of Henry P. Sturgis*, watercolour on ivory, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 92.2636, also Hing Qua (Chinese, active 1850-1880), *Portrait of a Sea Captain's Wife*, oil on canvas, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1995, 154.

⁴³ "Painting an Empress: Hubert Vos, K.C.D.D., the First Man to Portray the Dowager Empress of China", New York Times, 17 December 1905, X8.

Amsterdam, Brussels, Dresden and Munich, to come paint the empress's portrait⁴⁴. They were perhaps unaware that by the time of his arrival in 1905, he had become an American citizen, later active in American artistic circles, subsequently his portraits of Cixi may also be regarded as American interpretations of Chinese themes.

He extensively traveled and made a trip to China earlier, in the year 1899, a few months before the Boxer Rebellion began. During this visit, Vos sought permission to paint the empress dowager and her nephew, the Guangxu emperor, but he was unsuccessful, supposedly because of the prevailing anti-foreign flows all across China. Nonetheless, he selected a variety of subjects to depict in China, including a daughter of an official of the Fujian navy, and a portrait of a young Manchu man, as well as Yuan Shi-Kai (1859–1916), a viceroy who would later briefly become the first president of China, and Prince Qing (1836–1918), a senior member at court and a relative by marriage to the Empress Dowager, and a Suzhou girl from an aristocratic family⁴⁵ (**Picture 5**). Perhaps because of his background in painting society portraits, Vos' portraits of Asian subjects tended to endow them with a certain glamor and dignity. One critic described his portraits as “delicate, smooth, and accomplished.”⁴⁶, and that he made “the exotic” fashionable and tangible to his Western audience. Thus, by the 1900s he was already enhancing the Western art with Chinese motifs and themes.

The story of Vos's encounter with the empress survives primarily through letters he sent back home to his family, and the artist may have exaggerated the scope of his contact with the empress for the benefit of his audience, as earlier Katharine Carl has acted. Interestingly, Vos also mentioned the rejection of “shadows and no wrinkles”, as another request the Empress addressed to him⁴⁷. Nevertheless, he also underlined his personal fascination with the empress, “Erect, with a tremendous will power, more than I have ever seen in a human. Hard, firm will and thinking lines, and with all that a brow full of kindness and love for the beautiful. I fell straight in love with her.” Consequently, Vos's

⁴⁴ **Virginia Anderson**, *A Semi-Chinese Picture: Hubert Vos and the Empress Dowager of China, East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship*, ed. Cynthia Mills, Lee Glazer, and Amelia A. Goerlitz, Smithsonian Institution Press (Washington, D.C.), pp. 97-109, p. 98.

⁴⁵ Hubert Vos: Painter of China's Dowager Empress Cixi, Geringer Art, <https://www.geringerart.com/hubert-vos-painter-of-chinas-dowager-empress-cixi/>

⁴⁶ **Wang C.** (2012), “Going Public”: Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi, Circa 1904, *NAN NÜ*, 14(1), 119-176. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853212X652004>

⁴⁷ Following the second session, he said, she asked to see what he had done and through a translator expressed her critique, demanding “no shadows, no shadows, no shadows”. See Hubert Vos and Eleanor Kaikilani Vos, “*Adaptation of His Letters From Peking by his Wife, Lani, Thinking of a Magazine Article*” (typed transcript), undated, 5, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum curatorial file, 1943, p. 7.

account, the same as Carls', stands in sharp contrast to the image of Cixi's demoniacal figures, frequently illustrating the pages of Western magazines.

Vos created two portraits: one of them is in the collection of Harvard University while the other, larger image, has remained in China. That version was severely damaged in the 1950s, and was recently restored by a group of experts from the Dutch province of Limburg. It was put back on public display at the Summer Palace in 2008 (**Picture 6**).

The throne, her accessories, headdress, pearl earrings, gown, carpet, surroundings in this symmetrical composition play the same role in public perception, as in Carl's portrait- taste, wealth, status, identity, and were rendered the identical symbolism in the eyes of Chinese beholder. Although the artist also idealised the figure, the shape of the face, skin and sculpted facial features, but in Vos's canvas Cixi looks like a real personage, not a fairy queen. The sense of reality is transmitted through the light-and-shade modelling, mild shadows on her face and her robe: those dark spots granted the details with volume and realistically reflected texture. The bamboo background, as the symbol of righteousness and goodness, appears blurred, as a notion referring to the implementation of atmospheric perspective that provides the illusion of space. The palette is lighter and transparent, outlines are softer and subtle.

The gesture of holding the embroidered Asian-style fan, the vases of apples and furnishing is completely reminiscent of one of the Xunling's photographs⁴⁸, the monumental bamboo screen- to the one where Cixi is flanked by the wives of foreign envoys⁴⁹.

The balanced pyramids of apples on both sides in the finest blue-and-white porcelain dishes were not only auspicious symbols of the wish of peace and tranquility, but also the personal whim of Cixi: it was said she couldn't bare the scent of incense burners and preferred to make it fade away with the smell of countless fresh apples.

It's important to note that this work is essentially different from the Carl's in terms of its function and intended audience; it was meant for the eyes of the Chinese court and the empress herself, but even for her usage she wanted to see her own image preserved within space and time: eternally young and attractive; Vos highlighted in his memoirs that the Empress was more than satisfied with the final result⁵⁰. However, it was not the portrait of the individual, rather an allegoric image of the country.

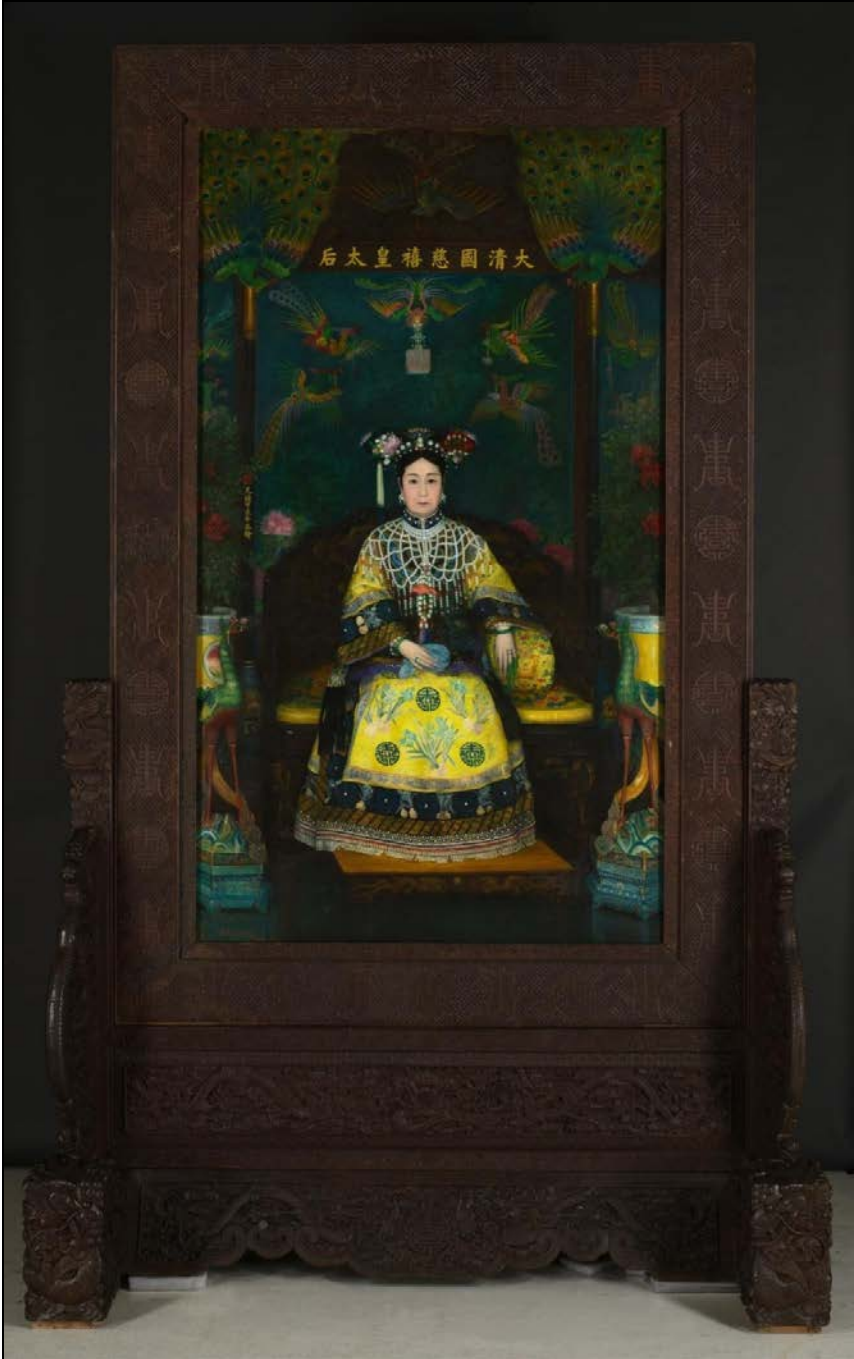
⁴⁸ See Xunling (1874-1943), *The Empress Dowager Cixi seated and holding a fan*, Glass plate negative (glass plate negative 1,12.7x10.2 cm. (5x4in.)), Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., FSA A.13 SC-GR-270.

⁴⁹ See Xunling (1874-1943), *The Empress Dowager Cixi with foreign envoys' wives in Leshoutang, Summer Palace, Beijing, 1903-1905*, housed at Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1 Glass plate negative (glass plate negative 1, 24.1x17.8 cm. (9.5x7 in.)), FSA A.13 SC-GR-249.

⁵⁰ Virginia Anderson, *A Semi-Chinese Picture*, p. 105.



Picture 1. Katharine A. Carl (in Chinese traditional dress) to do the painting for the 1904 St. Louis Exposition. (Smithsonian Libraries, Katharine A. Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, New York, The Century co, 1905, p. 234), Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institute



Picture 2. Katharine A. Carl, Empress Dowager Cixi, China, Qing dynasty, 1903. Oil on canvas with camphor wood frame. Transfer from the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, S2011.16, Courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum



Picture 3. Caricature, representing Dowager Cixi, Atlanta Constitution, June, 1900 (United States), caption “This frowning, begowned old lady is an interesting feature of the Boxer’ troubles. She bears a strong resemblance to Mrs. Nack, the New York murderess, and if gossip that has floated in from the Orient is reliable, she is aiding in wholesale slaughter by secretly encouraging the present uprising in China.”



Picture 4. The Empress Dowager sent this large and lavishly tinted photographic portrait to President Theodore Roosevelt in 1904. Courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum



Picture 5. Hubert Vos, Portrait of aristocratic woman in Suzhou, 1898, oil painting on canvas, The Capital Museum of Beijing, China, Courtesy of The Capital Museum



Picture 6. Hubert Vos, H. I. M. The Empress Dowager of China, Cixi, 1905. Oil on canvas, 92 × 54 in. Summer Palace, Beijing. Courtesy Arte et Cetera, (Hubert Vos) 荷兰画家的油画。慈禧皇太后坐在扶手椅上面。后面竹林画的背景上边有写《大清國慈禧皇太后》（简体《大清国慈禧皇太后。慈禧旁边有水果盘



Picture 7. Hubert Vos, H.I.M. The Empress Dowager of China, Cixi, 1905–1906, oil on canvas, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop. Photo by Katya Kallsen, Courtesy of the President and Fellows of Harvard College



Picture 8. Katharine A. Carl, Princesses of the court, drawing in the book “With the Empress Dowager”, New York, The Century co, 1905, page 40



Picture 9. Hubert Vos, Still life, 1933, oil on canvas, height 21 in., 53.3 cm; width: 27 1/4 in., 69.2 cm, Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Andrew I. McKee, Private collection, Courtesy of the Sotheby's

The second painting Vos finished when he was already in New York (**Picture 7**); in terms of uncovering the model's character and mood, psychological traits behind the visual appearance, while remaining faithful to his own manner and stylistic modes, the painting succeeded the most among the discussed and existing depictions of Cixi. In this dark, mystic and orientally-flavoured composition the Empress seems to permeate the viewer with the profoundness of her gaze. With the floating figure of the Chinese dragon, she has been turned into the embodiment of an unknown "Chinese deity" or likely the iconic phrase "dragon lady", but not in the negative sense the Western press crowned her, but in terms of inner strength and resistant character. This impression is supported with the visual means, such as the claws of dragon paralleling with the fingernail sharp covers of the empress. The figure of the dragon in its form and palette is a direct reference to the 11-18th centuries Chinese ink paintings on silk and scrolls with the dark-brown background and mystic representations of those composite creatures⁵¹, as either apotropaic figures or symbols of thunder, water, male origin and emperor. Vos presumably employed the multi-layered symbolism of the dragon as the protector of Cixi or the embodiment of Cixi herself. Vos also aimed to indicate the masculine features and absolute imperial power Cixi maintained. Her face, slightly elongated, is not youthful at all, though wrinkles and eye-bags do not diminish the strong impression from her image.

The appliance of Dutch Golden Age chiaroscuro, the dramatic lighting and play of shadows on her face tell the story of her life with a sense of melancholy and solitude, inkling the obstacles she had gone through in her struggles to survive in a hostile imperialistic world, at the same time gaining wisdom and grandeur, dignity and intelligence, pride and virtue in her long-lasting lifetime.

As a tribute to the Empress, Vos placed the painting in a massive, dark frame decorated with cloisonné panels and corner segments of open carving.

The painting was represented in the exhibition at the 1906 Paris Salon, nourishing the oriental taste of Occidental audiences with the more accented Western translation of the Asian royal's image.

Conclusion

The story of the discussed portraits is first and foremost a history of unordinary experience of the East-West interactions aka American-Chinese cultural encounters; both of the sides- American artists and Cixi, wished to benefit as much from it as possible. But as they were not quite familiar with each other's audiences, taste and traditions in terms of portraits, their employment and propagandistic distribution, the constituted function and role of the imperial image remaking partially failed. The other reason is those works were seemingly exhibited and publicly displayed very seldom. Thus, these two Western artists'

⁵¹ For instance, see Unidentified artist Chinese, (active late 15th-early 16th c.), 明佚名雲龍圖軸, *Dragon Amid Clouds and Waves*, 15th-16th century, hanging scroll; ink on silk, 42 15/16x26 3/8 in (109x67 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2007, 438.

books, letters and accounts, exaggerated or not, had greater impact on the American perception of Dowager Cixi's image, than their canvases.

The concept of "authentic/true likeness" was different for the East and for the West at that time; the West was embracing the modernistic waves of freedom of artistic expression, but China was still following its century-old traditions of ancestral worship and reflections of real objects and human characters from the auspicious and religious viewpoints. It was even reported, that initially, the empress was resistant to having her portrait painted, as traditionally that was an honour reserved for the deceased in China. There were no special protocols related to the treatment of Western portraitists in the Qing court, Western artists in their turn had less idea what they might expect from their royal commissioner. The communications and exchanging of ideas between the artists and their model resulted in the executions of artworks in Western traditions of oil canvases, where the empress doesn't look Western, but in the finest Chinese way with her full regalia: but the portraits on the other hand as pure artistic productions do not appear as "Western" oeuvre. Although Vos named his portraits of Cixi "semi-Chinese pictures", from that approach, Carl's canvases are more "Chinese" with their flat surface and stressed rigidity. In any instances, the works of both of the American artists is extremely hard to classify as fundamentally "Western" or "Eastern", "conservative" or "modern". Even if we categorise those paintings as "The West meets the East" theme, that would rather be appropriate to determine them as "East-West cultural clashes".

It was said that through her image-making campaign Cixi planned to emulate European female monarchs, more precisely Queen Victoria, having seen her earlier portraits. Regarding several photographs, this could be true, but as for the present oil paintings, Cixi didn't indeed deviate from her roots, and there was no visual evidence of imitations of others.

As for Carl, the portrait had a crucial impact on her career, but the fame of Dowager Cixi in the West passed away with the death of the empress in the year 1908. Besides, the tensions between China and the Western countries grew, and new intriguing political faces came to the arena. Apart from Cixi's commission, Carl didn't have any tangible artistic success recorded: court scenes, depictions of royal family members (**Picture 8**), Chinese landscapes and architecture, later included in her book, were only small-sized sketches with less aesthetic properties.

Vos, on the contrary, was more prolific in terms of developing China-inspired themes in his later works. His still life paintings of 1920-30s represent the Chinese antiquities, he got as personal gifts from the Empress Cixi either acquired by himself, in various juxtapositions and symbolic arrangements (**Picture 9**).

Despite the failure in their propagandistic function, those portraits of Cixi served as catalysts in extension of the Chinese themes in the American visual arts at large. And most importantly, depictions of Cixi as a chic Eastern lady with her luxurious Chinese accessories and surroundings to some extent cultivated visual

language for the upcoming depictions of Chinese female characters with increased femininity and charm in the American art of the early 20th century. The image of Chinese women as an “enchanted queens” was later popularised by Esther Anna Hunt⁵².

Besides, the execution of Chinese figures became ethnographically more accurate. Within this framework, it is undoubtedly significant to note the influence of Chinese backdrops, a peculiar trait of Vos's oriental paintings, on Asian background interpretations in the early and mid-20th century American portraits.

ԱՅՐԻ ՉԻՆ ԿԱՅՍՐՈՒՎԻ ՑԸՍԻ ԿԵՐՊԱՐԻ ՄԵԿՆԱԲԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԱՄԵՐԻԿԱՆ ՆԿԱՐԻՉՆԵՐԻ ԴԻՄԱՆԿԱՐՆԵՐՈՒՄ

ԱՆԻ ՄԱՐԳԱՐՅԱՆ (Չինաստան, Նանկին)

Երկար ժամանակ չինական թեմաների արծարծումը վաղ ամերիկյան արվեստում «փակ» էր ճապոնականության, գեղագիտական շարժման, մոդեռնիզմի և, որ ավելի կարևոր է, քաղաքական հանգամանքների պատճառով. այն է՝ Չինաստանի՝ որպես կայսրության անկումը և չին-ամերիկյան բարդ հարաբերությունները: XIX դարի վերջին - XX դարասկզբի ամերիկյան ակադեմիզմի ամենասիրված թեմաներից էին Չինաստանի և Չինական թաղամասերի (Chinatown) հետ կապված ժանրային տեսարանները, փողոցային տեսարանները, դիմանկարները, նատյուրմորտները: Այնուամենայնիվ, ամերիկյան մամուլը նկարազարդողների և ծաղրանկարիչների ստեղծած պատկերների միջոցով մեծապես ներգրավված է եղել Չինաստանի և չինական մշակույթի պատկերն ընդգծված բացասական լույսի ներքո ներկայացնող մեկնաբանումների մեջ: Հետևաբար, այդ ժամանակահատվածում քիչ ամերիկացի արվեստագետներ են պատկերել չինացիներին ու չինական միջավայրը հիացական տեսանկյունից: Միայն երկու ամերիկացի արվեստագետների՝ Քեթրին Ա. Կառլին և Հուբերտ Վոսին է հաջողվել ճանապարհ հարթել դեպի չինական արքունիք՝ հարստացնելով 1900-ականների սկզբի ամերիկյան արվեստը բարձրաշխարհիկ չինացիների և կայսրուհի Ցըսիի (1835-1908) աննախադեպ պատկերներով: Մի շարք հրապարակումներում նշված դիմանկարները ուսումնասիրվել են «քաղաքական ինքնաընկալման» տեսանկյունից, սակայն մեր ուսումնասիրությունը ևս մեկ ակադեմիական փորձ է՝ դիտարկելու այս նկարները անցյալ դարասկզբի ամերիկյան արվեստում Չինաստանին վերաբերող թեմաների և դրանց տարածման համատեքստում՝ ընդգծելով գեղարվեստական արժեքը, գործառույթը և կապը դիտողի հետ:

Քանայի բաներ¹ կայսրուհի Ցըսի, Ցին դինաստիա, Քեթրին Ա. Կառլ, Հուբերտ Վոս, ԱՄՆ, հակաչինական քարոզչություն, կայսերական դիմանկար:

⁵² Ani Margaryan, *Esther Anna Hunt: Developing Chinese Themes in American Art*, Art Stora, February 2021, <https://www.artstoriagalleria.com/esther-anna-hunt>

ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ ОБРАЗА КИТАЙСКОЙ ВДОВСТВУЮЩЕЙ ИМПЕРАТРИЦЫ ЦЫСИ В ПОРТРЕТАХ АМЕРИКАНСКИХ ХУДОЖНИКОВ

АНИ МАРГАРЯН (Китайская Народная Республика, Нанкин)

Китайские темы в раннем американском искусстве долгое время были «закрыты» из-за Японизма, Эстетического движения, модернизма и, что наиболее важно, в силу политических обстоятельств – упадка Китая как империи и сложных китайско-американских отношений. Одной из излюбленных тем американского академизма в конце XIX – начале XX вв. были жанровые сцены, уличные сцены, портреты, натюрморты, связанные с Китаем и китайскими кварталами (Chinatown). Однако несмотря на это американская пресса посредством образов, созданных иллюстраторами и карикатуристами, была в значительной степени вовлечена в негативную интерпретацию образа Китая и китайской культуры. Следовательно, в этот период лишь немногие американские художники позитивно и сквозь призму восхищения изображали китайцев и китайскую среду. Только двум американским художникам – Кэтрин А. Карл и Хьюберту Вос – удалось проложить путь к китайскому двору, обогатив американское искусство начала 1900-х годов образами представителей китайского светского общества и вдовствующей Великой императрицы Цыси (1835-1908). В ряде публикаций эти портреты исследовались с точки зрения «политического самовосприятия», но наша статья являет собой еще одну попытку рассмотрения этих картин в контексте китайской тематики и ее распространения в американском искусстве прошлого века, подчеркивающую их художественную ценность.

Ключевые слова – вдовствующая Цыси, Империя Цин, Кэтрин А. Карл, Хуберт Вос, США, антикитайская пропаганда, императорский портрет.