9 When There Is Peace, There Are Elephants

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Abstract

The Forbidden City, the symbolic and actual centre of power of the Qing Empire, was crowded with animals. This chapter focuses on elephants, a crucial part of imperial ceremonial processions. As performers in various imperial ritual ceremonies from the early Qing to almost the end of the dynasty, elephants exemplified how the palace machine of performative emperorship domesticated and imperialized wild animals, made them subject to imperial rule and metaphoric paragons of imperial virtue.

Keywords: animals, Qing Empire, elephant performance, zoological garden

The Forbidden City, the symbolic and actual centre of power of the Qing Empire, was crowded with animals: not just as emblems carved on stones but real, embodied, living animals. They were kept in tiger rings, horse or elephant stables, dog kennels, eagle cages, and institutions such as the Imperial Birdcage (*Bainiaofang* 百鳥房), and the Imperial Bestiary (*Baishoufang* 百獸房). The Qing court employed these live animals to perform imperial roles in three contexts: state ritual ceremonies (*si* 祀), military force (*rong* 戎), and the tribute system (*chaogong* 朝貢). Whereas a great variety of animal species played their part in the tribute system and as diplomatic gifts from afar to Qing emperors, some species were assigned special roles: elephants and tigers were mainly used in ritual ceremonies; horses, dogs, and eagles for military force. Animals used as raw materials for luxury objects were even more pervasive: from ivory used in home furnishings, to rhino horn drinking cups, to precious furs worn by officials, to name just a few examples. Furthermore, visitors, staff and officials, as well as the emperor and his family were surrounded by representations of

animals made from stone or metal, such as bronze lions and jade elephants, embroidered animals on rank badges on official robes, and animal-like costumes on the court theatre stage. All of these animals – dead or alive, real or representative, actual or imaginary – were gradually ‘imperialized’ into political actors by the ‘palace machine’ which provided the framework and incentive to acquire, possess, domesticate, train, transform, rank and integrate them into the political performances of the Qing monarchy. I here use the term ‘imperialized’ instead of ‘imperial’ based on the argument that turning animals into political actors was a long-term process of instruction, not a pre-existing, innate condition. In the same way, a person could be born as a Qing prince but only ‘become’ a Qing emperor by performing emperorship through the ‘stylized repetition of acts’ in various imperial ceremonies that were considered characteristic of this role.¹ Performance, as stylized repetition of acts in this case, does not mean to pretend as what one is not but to make the imperialization work.

This chapter examines what mechanism or operative chain was needed to transform these diverse animals into functioning components of the Qing imperial court, and why it was thought necessary to ‘imperialize’ them, turning them into subjects of Qing imperial rule. To do this, the chapter considers the administrative system of the Qing monarchy in the Forbidden City as a complex, multi-functional palace machine that executed performative emperorship together with animals. This palace machine of performative emperorship consisted of at least three main parts conducting various administrative tasks and policy-making duties: the Imperial Household Department (*Neiwufu* 內務府), which created and staffed imperial space, the Court of the Imperial Clan (*Zongrenfu* 宗人府), which managed imperial personnel, and the Imperial Procession Guard (*Luanyi wei* 鑾儀衛), which paraded imperial ritualization. In order to produce efficacious emperorship, this palace machine had to coordinate with administrative systems external to the court, sometimes even with administrative systems external to the empire, in order to cast and choreograph humans, animals and objects into imperial ceremonial performers.

This chapter focuses on imperial elephants. As performers in various imperial ritual ceremonies from the early Qing to almost the end of the

1 Here I invoke Judith Butler’s claim that ‘gender is in no way a stable identity... rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylised repetition of acts*’ [my emphasis]. See Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4 (Dec. 1988): 519. On Emperor Qianlong’s ritualizing power, see Angela Zito, *Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

dynasty, elephants exemplified how the palace machine of performative emperorship domesticated and imperialized wild animals, made them subject to imperial rule and metaphoric paragons of imperial virtue. Of all the live animals kept by the Qing monarchy administration system, only elephants and horses progressed through ranks according to a logic that copied that which promoted human officials. Their status increased with age and they were rewarded for being obedient. Both animal species have a long life expectancy and had the opportunity to be physically very close to the emperor during state ceremonies.² Through the prominent roles assigned to them, these animals were transformed into an extension of the emperor's will and body. Whereas horses were essential to the armed forces of the Manchu empire, elephants were designated emblems of the emperor's divine virtue. The presence of elephants was a sign that the mandate of Heaven still rested firmly in his hands. As the saying goes, 'when there is peace, there are elephants' (*taiping you xiang* 太平有象).

Elephants had been a crucial part of imperial ceremonial processions ever since the Song Dynasty. Why elephants, of all animals? In traditional Chinese political ideology, elephants were regarded as sentient beings capable of assisting sage kings; for instance, it was said that, 'in the faraway land of Cangwu 蒼梧 where the legendary sage king Shun (舜, reigned 3rd millennium B.C.E.) was buried, there were often elephants ploughing for him'. This implied that, 'wherever elephants reside, the land is fertile'.³ Elephants serving the emperor thus became a symbol for a prosperous land and for its leader's good governance.

Since an elephant's life expectancy ranges from sixty to eighty years, it is reasonable to assume that some imperial elephants kept in Beijing might have served several emperors through the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Ming monarchy instituted the Imperial Elephant Stables (*Xiangfang* 象房) located near Xuanwu Gate 宣武門 in the southwest corner of Beijing's Inner City wall. The stable was under the administration of the Brocade-clad Guard (*Jinyi wei* 錦衣衛), an elite corps of eunuch guards who were also in charge of palace security and surveillance in the empire. After the Manchu had conquered the Ming, the Qing monarchy took over those elephants and their

2 He Xinhua 何新華, 'Qingdai dongnanya gong xiang maoyi yanjiu 清代東南亞貢象貿易研究', *Dongnanya yanjiu* = *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, no. 1 (2011): 82.

3 The original text reads '舜葬蒼梧之野, 有群象常為之耕。.....象之所在, 其土必豐', see for example Chen Dazhang 陳大章, *Shi chuan mingwu jilan* 詩傳名物集覽, *juan* 3, 33a (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 edition. Reprint. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2008).

Figure 9.1 Treasure and leading elephant of the Grand Imperial Procession as depicted in the *Illustrations to the Statutes of the Great Qing* (Da Qing huidian tu 大清會典圖)

Source: Kungang et al., *Da Qing huidian tu*, juan 85, 10a, 11a. (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Pekinger Slg. 4; <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB000258D300031018> and <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB000258D300031020>, accessed August 2020. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

stables but transferred their management to the Imperial Procession Guard.⁴ The move emphasizes how crucial elephants were for Qing rituals – being indispensable for the set-up of the ‘grand imperial procession’ (*dajia lubu* 大駕鹵簿) and the ‘ceremonial imperial procession’ (*fajia lubu* 法駕鹵簿). The former arrangement was an integral part of all central imperial rites performed by the emperor himself, such as worshipping the Heaven and Earth, praying for harvests and praying for rain, while the latter was the procession set-up used for smaller-scale rituals, such as the daily gathering of officials at the imperial Outer Court (*chaohui* 朝會), and worshipping the Manchu ancestors at the Imperial Ancestral Temple (*Taimiao* 太廟). Nine elephants, five ‘treasure elephants’ (*bao xiang* 寶象) and four ‘leading elephants’ (*dao xiang* 導象) were on duty in the grand imperial procession (see Figure 9.1).

In order to sustain elephants as ceremonial guards in imperial processions, the monarchy had to inject a large amount of human resources and materials

4 Yu Minzhong 于敏中, *Qinding rixia jiuwen kao* 欽定日下舊聞, juan 72, 8a (*Siku quanshu* edition. Reprint. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2008).

into a well-designed system that executed a series of logistical tasks: a steady source of elephant tributes needed to be maintained, elephants needed to be tamed and trained, someone had to guide them through the ritual performances, and so forth. One function of the palace machine of performative emperorship was not only to make those wild elephants become capable of performing specific acts according to ceremonial scripts, but also to tame those vassal states, such as Annam (Vietnam), Myanmar (Burma), and Cambodia, from which elephant tributes usually came. In other words, the entity of an imperial elephant was more than just its own physical body, it was also an extension of the Qing empire.

The chapter next demonstrates how imperial elephants helped to manifest the authority of the monarchy, then examines what happened to them once the power of the dynastic palace machine had dwindled.

Calling the Loyal Imperial Elephants

Similar to human subjects, elephants were deemed to qualify for appointment as imperial guards based on their seniority and loyalty – that is to say, whether they had been consistently obedient over a long time or not.⁵ It was assumed that only elephants who were motivated to take on such a post and had shown their loyalty to the emperor were suitable. Lin Lu 林璐, a literatus in the 17th century, reported in his anecdote ‘On Elephants’ (*Xiang ji* 象記) that imperial elephants were recruited from among those animals who volunteered themselves instead of those that were taken by force. ‘When recruiting elephants’, Lin Lu explained, ‘the territory keeper (*shoutuzhe* 守土者) goes into the mountains and announces that the imperial court is in need of guardsmen and any elephant answering the call will receive an official post. The territory keeper will only lead those elephants down the mountains who kneel down and lower their heads as if giving their assent (*nuo* 諾); he should not capture the animals by force.’⁶

Elephants were thus regarded as extreme loyalists. One anecdote mentioned in Yao Yuanzhi’s 姚元之 (1783-1852) *Miscellaneous Notes from the Bamboo Leaf Pavilion* (*Zhuyeting zaji* 竹葉亭雜記) reflects on how people thought of elephants as ‘sentient beings’ (*lingwu* 靈物): ‘In autumn 1717, while

5 Lin Lu 林璐, ‘Xiangji 象記 (On Elephants)’, in *Yu chu xin zhi* 虞初新志, ed. Zhang Chao 張潮, *juan* 7, 63 (1700 edition; rep. *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1783. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995-2002).

6 Ibid.

marching with its fellow elephants, a sick imperial elephant stumbled and fell on Beijing's West Chang'an Street. This elephant first struggled to get up to its knees, then kowtowed three times to the north and three times to the west before collapsing. It died instantly. The kowtow to the north was to show its gratitude to the emperor; with the kowtow to the west it sent its regards to where it had been born'.⁷

In addition, imperial elephants of the former Ming dynasty, like human officials, were seen as 'remnant subjects' (*yimin* 遺民). It was said that, when the Ming rebel Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606-1645) stormed into the Forbidden City, all the imperial elephants lamented the dynasty's fall by howling and crying as Li's troops marched pass the Elephant Stable.⁸

The above-mentioned Lin Lu also wrote the following fictional anecdote about an elephant making a political stand during the Ming-Qing conflict:

The Chongzhen 崇禎 emperor [r. 1627-1644] of the Ming Dynasty once asked for elephant tributes from the south. One of the elephants [in the herd] indicated that it was willing to come [to Beijing]. However, the Ming dynasty collapsed before this elephant was sent to the capital. Years later in our grand [Qing] dynasty, the same herd of elephants was summoned to serve as tributes to the new monarchy. Most elephants [of the herd] showed up except the one [that had previously agreed to serve the Ming]. A few days later, it did come but only to take its wives home. After all, the other elephants were still ready to go to Beijing. The territory keeper explained to this elephant that the new Son of Heaven was so blessed that the entire universe was at his disposal and asked how it dared to refuse to answer his call. The elephant once again refused to come. When the territory keeper set up a cannon to threaten the elephant the elephant slowly moved forward into the range of the cannon and waited. What brave and loyal behaviour that was!⁹

Elephants were generally seen as loyal adherents who would rather die than betray their lord – just like the male elephant in the story above. But some were seen as turncoats (*erchen* 貳臣, literally 'officials who serve twice'), who willingly accepted the change of Heaven's mandate and swiftly transferred

7 Yao Yuanzhi 姚元之, *Zhuyeting zaji* 竹葉亭雜記, *juan* 2, 51 (1893 edition; rep. *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1139. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995-2002).

8 Yao Zhiyin 姚之駟, *Yuan Ming shi leichao* 元明事類鈔, *juan* 38, 7 (*Siku quanshu* edition. Reprint. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2008).

9 Lin, 'Xiang ji', 63.

their allegiance to the new Son of Heaven – like the female elephants in the story. During the Ming-Qing conflict, being a ‘turncoat’ could be as precarious as being a loyalist remnant subject. Just like human officials, imperial elephants were portrayed as struggling to maintain their loyalty during the drawn-out and violent dynastic transition.

The depiction of such loyalty conflicts gradually ceased, as the stability of Manchu emperorship increased. Zhang Jiliang’s 張際亮 (1799-1843) poem on the ‘Elephants’ Bathing Trip’ (*Xi xiang xing* 洗象行) describes ‘two elephants recruited from the previous dynasty that are too old to have any teeth left. But these two elephants are very docile and good at pulling the chariot, so they still follow the Son of Heaven on his tours of inspection’.¹⁰

Elephants were also sign of, and evidence of, Qing victory over a region. In 1646 Hong Chengchou 洪承疇 (1593-1665), an official in the Board of War,¹¹ reported to Qing Emperor Shunzhi 順治 (r. 1643-1661) that two tribute elephants from Yunnan 雲南 had been escorted by soldiers to Jiangning 江寧 (today’s Nanjing 南京). To Hong, ‘this proved that both Yunnan and Guizhou 貴州 have successfully been incorporated into the territory of the Qing Empire’.¹²

To survive the Ming-Qing transition, officials had to either position themselves as loyal remnants or turncoats; a third option was to betray both sides by trying to establish new dynasties of their own. Whichever option they chose, elephants functioned as pledge of loyalty and subservience. In 1655, in order to show their subservience and allegiance to the Qing Empire, Shang Kexi 尚可喜 (1604-1676), the governor-general of Guangdong, and Geng Jimao 耿繼茂 (?-1671), the governor-general of Fujian, endeavoured to deliver fourteen elephants from Guangzhou 廣州 to the imperial capital.¹³ We do not know if Emperor Shunzhi 順治 actually received the animals or not. In any case, those elephant tributes were a political statement of

10 Zhang Jiliang 張際亮, ‘Xi xiang xing 洗象行 (Elephants’ Bathing Trip)’, in *Wanqingyi shi hui* 晚晴詩匯, ed. Xu Shichang 徐世昌, *juan* 138, 3138 (1929 edition; rep. *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1629-33. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995-2002).

11 Hong Chengchou was one of the more successful ‘turncoats’. He had originally sworn his allegiance to the Ming Chongzhen emperor but later defected to the Qing.

12 ‘Zhaofu Jiangnan daxueshi wei jie jin xiang shi shi 招撫江南大學士為解進象隻事 (Solutions from Jiangnan Scholars on Elephant Tributes)’, in *Ming-Qing shiliao* 明清史料, ed. Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yanjiusuo 中央研究院歷史語言研究所 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo 1957-1958), *jia bian* 甲編, no. 6: 505.

13 ‘Pingnanwang wei jiesong xiang zhi shi 平南王為解送象隻事 (King Pingnan and Elephant Tributes)’, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo cang Ming-Qing shiliao* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所藏明清史料 (Ming-Qing historical materials stored at the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taipei), no. 150407-001.

peaceful surrender, although Shang and Geng later joined Wu Sangui 吳三桂 (1612-1678) to revolt against the Manchu emperor in 1668.

In sum, during the Ming-Qing transition tribute elephants and the loyal services they provided to the monarchy functioned as embodiments of the loyalty of the vassal states those elephants came from. As sentient beings who were considered to have volunteered for lifelong service and loyalty, elephants were welcomed as emblems of peace and stability in the realm.

Elephant Tributes for the Son of Heaven

Symbolism aside, transporting and looking after the animals on their way to Beijing posed considerable logistical and practical challenges. Thus, whether the delivery of elephant tributes was smooth or rough indicated the degree of stability of the Qing state in a tangible manner. The administrative system handling elephant tributes operated rather well during the 18th century. Thus, at certain times there were more than enough elephants at the disposal of the Qing Imperial Guards. At other times, however, when the elephant tribute system showed difficulties or problems, this was probably because the empire itself was in trouble. In 1853, for instance, the outburst of the Taiping Rebellion hindered the elephant tributes from arriving at the imperial capital. The elephants could not proceed north, so were temporarily kept in Yunnan.¹⁴

In order to guarantee tribute elephants and their trainers a safe journey from the southern edges of the empire to the imperial capital, a series of administrative systems – from the empire's borders to the court – needed to be activated. On the over 3,000-kilometre long journey the proper procedure for numerous tasks needed to be ensured, from crossing borders with the correct papers at hand, to food and accommodation at the various stations. In 1793 for instance, when the Gurkhas delivered elephants and horses to the Qing as tributes after the Sino-Gurkha War, General Fuk'anggan 福康安 (1754-1796), who was the governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi (*Liangguang zongdu* 兩廣總督) at the time, devised a detailed security plan for the trek from Gurkha through Tibet to Beijing. Fuk'anggan personally accompanied the excursion to Tibet and frequently exchanged memorials with Emperor Qianlong to confirm the progress of the trip along stations

14 Wu Zhenyu 吳振棫, 'Hao gong xiang xing you xu 後貢象行有序 (Preface to Elephant Tributes)', in idem., *Huayiguan shi chao* 花宜館詩鈔, juan 15, 165 (1865 edition; rep. *Xuxiu Sikuan* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1521. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995-2002).

on its way to Beijing. Hosting a tribute excursion on its way to the capital could be a logistical challenge and financial risk for a place. But sometimes it could also have its profitable sides, as when the emperor instructed that both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama in Tibet should receive an elephant when the expedition passed through their territory, and that all the tribal chiefs involved in this tribute campaign should be awarded as well.¹⁵ The painting *Elephant and Horse Tributes from the Gurkha Campaign* (Guo'erke jin xiang ma tujian 廓爾喀進象馬圖卷) by Prince Hongwu 弘晔 (1743-1811) depicts the conditions that elephants and horses might have experienced along these tribute journeys and also shows how they attracted large groups of commoners and children as onlookers.¹⁶ Not only did these tribute campaigns take elephants to the capital, on their long journeys to the capital the elephants also served as a display of the omnipresence and omnipotence of imperial power. Ordinary people who might never have the chance to travel to the imperial capital themselves could at least imagine that, even though the emperor was as far away as the sky, he was able to exercise his power to tame those giant elephants as well as the faraway states they came from. Furthermore, the tribute campaigns also served as periodic tests to ascertain if there were any loopholes within the empire's airtight bureaucracy.

Tribute journeys were an endurance test for the administrative system. They were full of potential difficulties and problems and thereby challenged the stability, but also the flexibility, of several of the empire's internal administrative mechanisms. On 17th August 1875, a news report in *Shenbao* 申報 stated that a diplomatic corps from Burma with seven elephants were on their way to the capital.¹⁷ They were scheduled to travel through several provinces – from Guizhou, Hunan 湖南, Hubei 湖北 and Henan 河南, before finally reaching Zhili 直隸. After arriving in Hubei, they took a substitute, slightly Western route via the Jingzhou 荊州 prefecture since the scheduled receiver in Wuhan 武漢 could not manage to host them. Therefore, a temporary elephant ring was set up from bamboo stalks outside

15 'Fukang'an deng zou Kuoerka jingong xiangzhi mapi zaitu xingzou qingxing zhe 福康安等奏廓爾喀進貢象隻馬匹在途行走情形各摺 (Memorials from General Fuk'anggan regarding Elephant Tributes from Gurkha), in *Huangchao xu wenxian tongkao* 皇朝續文獻通考, ed. Liu Jincan 劉錦藻, juan 62 (rep. *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995-2002).

16 See the reproduction of the painting on the website of the Palace Museum in Beijing, <https://digicol.dpm.org.cn/cultural/detail?id=092965fe51b644fcb84d98ca88be5630>, accessed June 2020.

17 All *Shenbao*'s news reports about the Qing court were transcribed from the official reports of *Jingbao* 京報 or *Dibao* 邸報, the daily news published by the court.

the south gate of the town of Jiangling 江陵, which attracted 'children, women and idlers from the city' (*hong tong hong nü yiji youshou haoxian zhi bei* 黃童紅女以及遊手好閒之輩). Jiangling's local authority failed to control the excited crowd that had rushed over to see the elephants, and some impetuous people even climbed the bamboo wall to have a better look. When some of them were hurt by an elephant which hit them with its trunk, people started panicking and knocked down parts of the bamboo wall. Two elephants nearly escaped. Over thirty people died or were injured in the incident, mostly because they trampled upon each other.¹⁸ The news report did not relate whether any officials were punished for this tragic event, but there was clearly a need to prevent further accidents. To better guard and facilitate the onward journey of the diplomatic corps, the inspector-general of Henan Province, Liu Qi 劉齊 ordered the prefectural magistrate Chen Yuanhao 陳元誥, who was to host the corps at their next station, to receive them in person at the border between Hubei and Henan.¹⁹

When the supply of imperial elephants became insufficient during the late Qing, the Imperial Household Department put provincial governors directly in charge of purchasing elephants and sending them to the capital. Whether the elephants came from domestic purchase or foreign tributes, the administrative and financial burden of their hosting and delivery had to be borne by the provincial governors in charge.²⁰ In addition, if anything went wrong, such as the Jiangling tragedy in 1875 recounted above, it would result in further administrative trouble and the chance of punishment. Therefore, local chiefs generally did their best to either deter or postpone any such delegations or tribute missions from passing through their county.²¹ Meanwhile, the empire was also dependent on the internal situation in Burma and Vietnam for its purchase of elephants from those countries. The absence of political stability in Burma or Vietnam would lead to an absence of elephants.

The number of elephants kept varied during different reigns of the Qing period. The changing number suggested the scale, and probably depreciation, of the palace machine in this regard. According to the *Archive of the Imperial Procession Guard* (Luanyiwei quanzong dang 鑾儀衛全宗檔), the Imperial Elephant Stables housed between seventeen and 30 animals in the Qianlong

18 'Miandian gongshi gaidou 緬甸公使改道 (Burma Envoy Changes His Way)', *Shenbao* 申報, 17 Aug. 1875.

19 'Guangxu yuannian bayue ershi ri Jingbao quanlu 光緒元年八月二十日京報全錄 (News from the Capital, Guangxu 1, 20th day of the 8th month)', *Shenbao* 申報, 30 Sept. 1875.

20 Mao Xianmin 毛憲民, 'Qingdai Luanyi wei xunxiang suo yang xiang 清代鑾儀衛馴象所養象', *Zijin cheng* = *Forbidden City*, no. 3 (1991): 17.

21 'Dijing jishi 帝京紀事 (Notes from the Imperial Capital)', *Shenbao* 申報, 12 Oct. 1892.

reign (1736-1795) and between sixteen and 35 in the Jiaqing 嘉慶 reign (1795-1820). From then on the number decreased. In the Daoguang 道光 reign (1821-1850) there were between eleven and fifteen elephants, and in 1866, the Xianfeng 咸豐 reign, only six remained.²² The number went further down until there were only four imperial elephants left to perform ritual duties in 1883,²³ and, by 1893, only one young elephant was in the stable.²⁴

Imperial elephants were not just role-bearers and emblems, they also were physical bodies that needed care and fodder. Each elephant consumed at least 160 *jin* 斤 (catty, about 94.4 kilograms) of straw every day, some of which came from the imperial fields managed by the *Fengchenyuan* 奉宸苑, (the Bureau of Imperial Gardens and Parks, henceforth 'Garden Bureau'), and the rest was purchased on the market. When in 1887, for instance, the imperial fields could not supply enough straw to feed the four imperial elephants, the Garden Bureau had to pay 129 taels of silver to buy an additional 227,200 catties of straw, i.e. 32,457 bundles in total.²⁵ In fact, it cost more to feed imperial elephants than carnivorous beasts.²⁶ As early as in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), the poet Ai Xingfu 艾性夫 (n.d.) had criticized the waste of imperial resources in keeping elephants for what he considered to be a system that presented a false appearance of peace and prosperity. Ai argued that what people really needed was not elephants, but good harvests.²⁷

Elephant Training and Performances

The Imperial Elephant Stable was located outside of the Xuanwu Gate 宣武門 at the southwest corner of the Inner City wall of Beijing (see Map 2 at the

22 Mao Xianmin, 'Qingdai Luanyi wei xunxiang suo yang xiang', 17.

23 'Jingdu jinxin 京都近信 (Recent news from the Imperial Capital)', *Shenbao* 申報, 7 Sept. 1883.

24 'Fengbi zanhao 楓陛簪毫 (Notes in Autumn)', *Shenbao* 申報, 29 Oct. 1893.

25 'She caochang 設草廠 (Establishment of Imperial Rice Straw Hall)', in *Da Qing huidian shili* (Guangxu ban) 大清會典事例 (光緒版), ed. by Kungang 崑岡 et al., *juan* 21, 1864 (rep. in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 798-814. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995-2002).

26 According to an entry in an accounting report (*zouxiao dang* 奏銷檔) of 1740, a mature tiger consumed around five catties of meat every day. If one catty of meat cost 40 copper coins (*wen* 文), then the court spent at least 73,000 *wen* of copper coins a year to raise one tiger, or 73 taels of silver a year. See 'Ying gou shi ge yong yin 鷹狗食餉用銀', in *Qianlong chao zouxiao dang* 乾隆朝奏銷檔案, microfilm no. 353-354, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

27 Ai Xingfu 艾性夫, 'Annan gongxiang 安南貢象 (Elephant Tributes from Annam)', in idem, *Shengyu* 剩語, *juan* 2, 25 (*Siku quanshu* edition. Reprint. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2008).

beginning of this volume, no. 8). The gate was open to officials who were granted the opportunity to visit the imperial palaces. On their way they could watch the elephants being fed or, by paying the trainers some small change, request the elephants to perform some simple tricks. For instance, Ji-Won Park 朴趾源 (1737-1805), a Korean envoy who visited Beijing in the 18th century, reported visiting the Imperial Elephant Stable where he watched the animals following their trainers' orders to perform tricks such as kneeling, kowtowing and then howling, waving their trunks, making sounds like flutes and pipes, and stumping their feet.²⁸ In addition to charging visitors to watch the elephants perform, the trainers at the Imperial Stable also made profits by engaging in other businesses, for example, selling elephant dung. In 1893 when there was only one young elephant left in the stable, the market price of elephant dung was sky-high.²⁹ When an imperial elephant died, its skin and bones were removed and stored at the Imperial Armoury (*Wubeiyuan* 武備院) in case the Imperial Dispensary (*Yuyaofang* 御藥房) needed them as medicinal ingredients (on the Imperial Dispensary see Chapter Eight).³⁰ Ivory was another valuable material for making luxury decorative objects.

Twelve full-time professionals shared the task of elephant-training in the Training Office (*Xunxiangsuo* 馴象所).³¹ In preparation for every imperial procession, the Training Office had to carry out several rehearsals to ensure that the elephants were familiar with all the steps involved. In order to prepare for the ceremony of Worshipping the Earth (*jiaosi* 郊祀), for instance, in 1887 'the Imperial Possession Guard official ordered the keeper of the Elephant Training Office to take the elephants to the Imperial Chariot Garage (*Luanjiaku* 鑾駕庫) on the 26th day of the 4th leap month of the lunar calendar so that they could have a drill with the full set of five chariots and all other necessary equipment'.³² The Qing grand imperial procession demanded five 'treasure elephants' (*bao xiang* 寶象) carrying bronze vases and four 'leading elephants' (*dao xiang* 導象) to walk in the procession (see Figure 9.1). In other words, nine elephants had to take the field together.

28 Ji-Won Park 朴趾源, 'Huangtu ji lue 黃圖紀略 (Notes on the Forbidden City)', in *Rehe riji* 熱河日記, *juan* 5, 327 (rep. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1997). A similar performance at the elephant stable is given in a record from the Russian diplomatic corps visiting the imperial capital in 1692. See Chen Qiyuan 陳其元, 'Pin meng riji 聘盟日記 (Diary on A Diplomatic Trip)', in idem, *Yongxianzhai biji* 庸閒齋筆記, *juan* 5, 56-62 (1874 edition; rep. *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1142. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995-2002).

29 'Feng bi zan hao 楓陛簪毫 (Notes in Autumn)', *Shenbao* 申報, 29 Oct. 1893.

30 'Chun ming ji shi 春明紀事 (Notes in Spring)', *Shenbao* 申報, 5 June 1886.

31 Liu Jincan, *Huangchao wenxian tongkao*, *juan* 86: 5.

32 'Jing chen za lu 京塵雜錄 (Some Notes on Life in Imperial Capital)', *Shenbao* 申報, 24 June 1887.

During the late Qing, however, the number of imperial elephants in the procession was gradually reduced, due to a lack of available animals. In 1888, with only four elephants left in the stable, only one elephant walked in each procession of the ceremony of Worshipping the Earth.³³

Some aspects of caring for the elephants were also entertaining for commoners in Beijing. For instance, the Elephant Bathing Day (*xixiang jie* 洗象節) was an annual event hosted by the Imperial Elephant Stable on the 6th day of the 6th month in the lunar calendar. It was a favourite summer festival for Beijing citizens, when all the elephants were led from the stable to the moat outside the Xuanwu Gate to bathe themselves in turn. One report in the newspaper *Shenbao* noted that, 'on that day the site would be packed with people from all over the place and looked like it was crowded with enormous ants'.³⁴

Elephants' Impromptu Performances

Glitches occurred in the colossal palace machine as it tested the limits imposed by natural constraints. Qing imperial elephants were originally born and bred in countries with a warm climate all year round. When delivered to the north and faced with a severely cold winter and the regimen of long and harsh training to fulfil their imperial procession duties, some of these elephants turned into giant, lethal beasts.

In 1882, one particular elephant was responsible for three serious incidents. The first happened on the 1st day of the 7th month of the lunar calendar, when a trainer was killed by the elephant's huge tusks when he failed to control the animal properly while passing through the city at Eastern Chang'an Street on the way to a ceremony held at the Imperial Ancestral Temple.³⁵ About three months later, that same elephant became out of control again and stepped on and killed a street vendor near the Western Chang'an Gate.³⁶ Just a few days later the elephant escaped from the stable at night and trampled an old lady to death while running through the narrow alleyways of Beijing. The residents in the area neighbouring the Imperial Elephant Stable understandably panicked, and more than twenty

33 'Jiao si gong ji 郊祀恭紀 (Records of Earth worship)', *Shenbao* 申報, 10 Jan. 1888.

34 'Yu yuan chan zheng 御苑蟬聲 (The Sound of Cicada in Imperial Garden)', *Shenbao* 申報, 31 July 1893.

35 'Jingdu zawen 京都雜聞 (Some News on Life in Imperial Capital)', *Shenbao* 申報, 3 Sept. 1882.

36 'Dumen jinshi 都門近事 (Current Events in Imperial Capital)', *Shenbao* 申報, 19 Nov. 1882.

trainers from the Elephant Training Office were dispatched to track down the escaped elephant, eventually managing to capture the animal.³⁷ Due to these three incidents, on the next year's Elephant Bathing Day, only the other three elephants were allowed to have their bath in the moat. However, one of those, a female elephant, became angry when a trainer forced her to move forward. The creature 'rolled and waved its trunk, shook its head and roared loudly'. Most of the onlookers were so frightened that they instantly ran away, leaving their own belongings behind. In order to avoid any potential accident, the elephant trainers did not allow that elephant to have her annual bath either.³⁸ Furthermore, the *Shenbao* reports between 1886 and 1887 suggest that from then on, when rituals required imperial elephant processions, experts would first determine whether the elephants were tame and tractable enough to perform their duties; if not, they were made to stay in their stable to avoid any possible trouble.³⁹ The *Shenbao*'s last report on this issue appeared at the end of 1887: 'One of the imperial elephants has been suffering from a bad temper from time to time. Some days ago it became so angry that it attempted to break the gate bolt and escape; fortunately, a gate keeper arrived and stopped it before the incident got out of hand'.⁴⁰ This event led to the final decision to no longer parade elephants in imperial processions.

According to the memoirs of Lady-in-Waiting Der Ling 德齡 (1885-1944), in 1903 the Empress Dowager Cixi had once commanded a Russian circus which was performing in the Imperial Capital at the time to set up tents in the radish field beside the Kunming Lake 昆明湖 of the Yiheyuan 頤和園, the new summer palace northwest of Beijing. Around 200 imperial officials and royal family members then watched a performance. Empress Dowager Cixi had insisted that no dangerous beasts, such as lions and tigers, were allowed to enter the palace or take part in the show, but she did not object to elephants. She was so impressed by a baby elephant that it was later given to her by the ringmaster as a gift.⁴¹ The empress dowager accepted the gift, but none of the palace staff knew how to make the elephant perform as it had done in the circus show, so it was sent to the Imperial Elephant Stable to live with the other elephants. If Der Ling's account was true, it would

37 'Xuanxiang fu 馴象復 (Elephant Training)', *Shenbao* 申報, 26 Nov. 1882.

38 'Jingdu jin xin 京都近信 (Current News in Imperial Capital)', *Shenbao* 申報, 7 Sept. 1883.

39 'Nian xia jiwen 輦下紀聞 (Notes on His Majesty)', *Shenbao* 申報, 28 June 1887.

40 'Jin tai qiu xu 金臺秋旭 (Autumn Morning in Imperial Capital)', *Shenbao* 申報, 1 Nov. 1887.

41 Der Ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City* (London: T. Fisher, 1912). Thanks to Prof. Christine Moll-Murata for bringing my attention to Der Ling's memoirs. On Der Ling's and other palace ladies' memories see Moll-Murata's Chapter One.

mean that elephants were still being kept in the stable in 1903. Be that as it may, the Qing Imperial Elephant Stable did not acquire any new animals and was eventually closed down after all the elephants had died.⁴²

The End of Imperial Elephant Performances

As elephants gradually lost their role in Qing imperial ceremonies and rituals, because of their diminishing numbers and the fear of incidents such as those recounted above, circuses presenting shows co-performed by human beings surfaced as a new form of animal performance. Elephants and other exotic animals gained a new role in the scheme of Western commercial performances and exhibitions, either in the form of circuses or in small-scale private zoos. In the beginning both emphasized the entertaining function of animals. By the end of the 19th century, there was already an international trade in animals to feature in circuses and profit-making private zoos. The earliest mention of European circuses performing in China in the *Shenbao* newspaper can be traced back to 1874.⁴³ On 14th June 1882, G. Chiarini's Royal Italian Circus and Performing Animals arrived in Shanghai, after touring big coastal cities in Asia. To promote their show, which included tigers, monkeys, kangaroos, bears and others, they launched a series of advertisements in *Shenbao*.⁴⁴ The spectacle was so popular that this circus visited Shanghai again in 1886 and 1887. The illustrated supplement to the *Shenbao*, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* (*Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報), depicted the densely packed Western and Chinese spectators at the Chiarini performances and the scenery of caged wild animals displayed outside the show (see Figures 9.2a and b). In 1889, some of the older, retired animals from this circus, including tigers, lions, bears and monkeys, were sold to the Yangshupu Garden (Yangshupu da huayuan 楊樹浦大花園) in Shanghai.⁴⁵ The Yangshupu Garden was a privately-owned, Western-style botanical and zoological garden which opened to the public in 1889 and displayed wild

42 'Xiang fang 象房 (Imperial Elephant Stable)', *Guanhua zhuyin zimu bao* 官話注音字母報 (Official Language Newspaper), vol. 24 (1918): 27 (rep. in *Zhongwen qikan quanwen shuju ku* 中文期刊全文数据库, 1911-1949, edited by Quanguo baokan suoyin, Shanghai).

43 'Xu lu xiguo maxi 續錄西國馬戲 (Continued Records on Western Circus)', *Shenbao* 申報, 1 July 1874.

44 'Zhi shou qian 鸞獸起岸 (Birds and Beasts Arrive Ashore)', *Shenbao* 申報, 15 June 1882. Advertisements were launched on the last pages of the *Shenbao* in June and July of 1886 and 1887 and between late April and mid July in 1889.

45 'Zhong shou de suo 眾獸得所 (All Beasts Settle Down)', *Shenbao* 申報, 9 July 1889.

Figure 9.2a-b 'Western Show [i.e. G. Chiarini's Royal Italian Circus and Performing Animals] Arrived Again (in Shanghai)' (*xi xi chong lai* 西戲重來)

The illustrations were made by artist Wu Youru 吳友如 (1840-1894). *Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報, Fifth collection, part 1 (*di quji shang* 第五集上), 42-43, 1898 edition, Shanghai: [Shenbao guan]. Part of 'Shanghai's Lens on the New(s)', *Visualizing Cultures*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2015. https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/dianshizhai/dsz_gal.html, accessed September 2020. CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 US)

animals such as tigers, leopards, lions, elephants and turkeys in cages.⁴⁶ However, due to the venue's poor management, the owner soon found himself unable to afford to feed the larger animals, and sold the lions and tigers to another circus in 1892.⁴⁷

In 1907 the first state-run zoological garden in Beijing opened to the public.⁴⁸ While animals had lost their roles in Qing imperial performances, these new forms of entertainment shows now facilitated their appearances – in the case of the Beijing zoo, charging twenty copper coins for every admission ticket.⁴⁹ These animals differed from the elephants described above, since they were neither captured nor tribute animals, but goods bought on the international market. Many of the first group of exotic animals in the zoo, including one elephant, were purchased from Germany in 1906 by Duanfang 端方 (1861–1911), who was serving as the governor-general of Jiangsu and Zhejiang (*Liang Jiang zongdu* 兩江總督) at that time; the other domestic animals were collected from local governments all over the country.⁵⁰

In this transition from Qing imperial stables to Beijing public zoological garden, one may discern a change in the mechanism through which the managers of the Qing empire domesticated its subjects – human and animal alike. It might also indicate an accelerated modern turn of the palace machine. Following Empress Dowager Cixi's original plan, the public zoological garden was a section of the Agricultural Experiment Field of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce (*Nong-gong-shang bu nongshi shiyan chang* 農工商部農事實驗場, henceforth Agricultural Experiment Field), about three kilometres outside Beijing's Xizhi Gate (*Xizhimen* 西直門). The Agricultural Experiment Field occupied 71 hectares structured into four sections: the zoological garden (*dongwuyuan* 動物園), the botanical garden (*zhiwuyuan* 植物園), the agricultural experiment laboratories (*shiyanchang* 試驗場), and the Agricultural High School (*Chudeng nongxuetao* 初等農學堂).⁵¹ The entire Agricultural Experiment Field was officially opened to the public on 16th June 1908, named the 'Park of Ten Thousand Living

46 'You dahuayuan ji 遊大花園記 (A Visit to the Grand Garden)', *Shenbao* 申報, 14 Sept. 1889.

47 'Shihu yi zhu 獅虎易主 (Lions and Tigers have a New Master)', *Shenbao* 申報, 18 May 1892.

48 Yu Hui-chun 余慧君, 'Cong huangji lingyou dao wanshengyuan – Da Qing diguo de dongwu shoucang yu zhanshi 從皇家靈園到萬生園——大清帝國的動物收藏與展示 (From Imperial Menageries to Public Zoological Garden: Captive Wild Animals at the Qing Court)', *Xin shixue* = *New History*, vol. 29, no. 1 (March 2018): 1–57.

49 *Dagong bao* 大公報 (Tianjin edition), no. 1804 (20 July 1907).

50 *Dagong bao* 大公報 (Tianjin edition), no. 1759 (5 June 1907).

51 Yang Xiaoyan 楊小燕, *Beijing dongwuyuan zhi* 北京動物園志 (Beijing: Zhongguo linye chubanshe, 2002), 96–99.

Beings' (*Wanshengyuan* 萬生園) by its visitors.⁵² It was equipped with many additional diverting facilities including restaurants, cafés, a photo studio and travel lodges for the royal family. In 1955, it became the Beijing Zoo (*Beijing Dongwuyuan* 北京動物園).

The Agricultural Experiment Field was Cixi's last eye-catching political accomplishment, and one which the empress dowager herself visited quite often. The land had formerly belonged to the Leshan travel palace (*Leshanyuan* 樂善園) and been managed by the Imperial Household Department as lotus fields rented to tenants (see Chapter Seven). With this new identity and function, the Agricultural Experiment Field was placed under the administration of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce. This brand new ministry of Qing central government, established in 1906, resulted from the political reform movement that Empress Dowager Cixi started in 1905, the 'movement of preparation for constitutionalism' (*yubei lixian yundong* 預備立憲運動). Cixi appointed Duanfang 端方 (1861-1911) and four other high-ranking officials to visit Japan, the US and many European states to scrutinize their constitutional systems. Leaving China on 11th December 1905, it took six months to complete the entire trip and these five officials brought back many Western ideas to reshape the Qing Empire into a modern state with a constitutional monarchy.⁵³ Duanfang advised Cixi that it was necessary to build libraries, museums, zoos, parks, and other public facilities for civic education.⁵⁴ Without hesitation, Cixi immediately added the zoo to the blueprint of the Beijing Agricultural Experiment Field, as one aspect of the state's 'preparation for constitutional change'.

52 Some literatures used a different character for *sheng*, i.e. 牲 (animal, including sacrificial animals) instead of 生 (living being), thus naming the Agricultural Experiment Field *Wanshengyuan* 萬牲園 ('Park of Ten Thousand Animals'). If we consider the Agricultural Experiment Field as a whole, and the zoological garden as just a portion of it, *Wanshengyuan* written as 'living being' 生 seems more accurate than written as 'animal' 牲. However, since the zoological garden was open to the public one year earlier than the rest of the field, it is quite possible that tourists used the latter term, i.e. 萬牲園 at first, and then changed to the other one, i.e. 萬生園, afterwards. Whichever *sheng* was used in its name, in Qing official documents its appellation is 'Agricultural Experiment Field of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce'. The Agricultural Experiment Field was the sixth state-run experiment field in the late Qing. See 'Shangbu zouqing bo guandi xingban nongshi shiyanchang zhe 商部奏請撥官地興辦農事試驗場摺', *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌, vol. 3, no. 6 (1906): 112-113 (rep. *Zhongwen qikan quanwen shuju ku* 中文期刊全文数据库).

53 For the details of Duanfang's trip, see Dai Hongci 戴鴻慈, *Chushi jiu guo riji* 出使九國日記 (Beijing: Diyi shuju, 1906).

54 'Dai Duan liang dachen zou geguo daomin shanfa qing cidai juban zhe 戴端兩大臣奏陳各國導民善法請次第舉辦摺', *Shengjing shibao* 盛京時報, 7 Oct. 1906.

Responding to requests for political reform, the Qing palace machine of performative emperorship gradually transferred some of its power and driving force into arms of the Qing State central government, such as the new Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce. Formerly the Qing palace machine had exclusively been able to create imperialized bodies – transforming humans into emperors and tribute animals into elephant officials. Despite allowing for reforms the court still expected institutions such as the Agricultural Experiment Field to keep the image of a prospering empire alive and nurture the imperialized body of the whole Qing palace machine, of which animals, human subjects, the imperial family and emperor were constituent parts. It was considered vital to maintain the myth that the Manchu empire was sustained through the mandate of Heaven, whilst changing the mechanism by which this was accomplished. Instead of transforming animals into imperialized bodies, the animals in the Beijing Agricultural Experiment Field were displayed as a nation state's collection, aiming to satisfy the public gaze and thirst for knowledge. They introduced the civic body to an alternative state-making myth, that of a state of China with a constitutional Manchu monarchy. In this new political context, elephants and all other living beings in the Agricultural Experiment Field became simultaneously scientific subjects and objects for citizens' everyday amusement. In contrast to the elephants that had performed in imperial processions, zoo animals were not expected to be loyal or tame. They were meant to be just wild animals, showcasing the abundance and variety of various species. These creatures were presented as animals, who 'should not be endowed with [such human qualities as] morality, fierceness, stupidity, and sentience' (*wuliang* 無良、*wumen* 無猛、*wuchun* 無蠢、*wuling* 無靈), as Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864-1912) commented after visiting the zoological garden.⁵⁵

Along with the abolition of imperial elephants and their guardsmen in imperial processions, natural animals were no longer undergoing the transformation into imperialized bodies to become metaphors of loyalty and virtue or displays of imperial power. Nonetheless, the animals at the Beijing Agricultural Experiment Field were also fully integrated into the political mechanisms and metaphors of the Qing monarchy. The change from elephants and imperial guards leading the emperor's procession to the Temple of Heaven or Temple of Earth to pray for peace and prosperousness,

55 Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲, 'Wan sheng yuan/Garden of ten thousand animals 萬牲園', in idem, *Lingyun hairilou shichao* 嶺雲海日樓詩鈔, *juan* 11, 132 (1937 edition; rep. *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1576. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995-2002).

to elephants caged in the public zoological garden of the Agricultural Experiment Field reflected the transfer from a palace machine powering performative emperorship to a performative statecraft operated by a state administration system. Empress Dowager Cixi's Agricultural Experiment Field was intended to demonstrate the appealing stance of 'breeding and nurturing all lives' (*shengyang wanwu* 生養萬物) in order to 'love and nourish all ten thousand human subjects' (*ziyang wanmin* 滋養萬民). This was to be achieved not through praying and ploughing or impressive performances – as in the centuries of imperial rule in the past – but through a new political theatre in which various animals, plants, agricultural professionals and students (as future professionals), were staged to perform Cixi's 'preparation for constitutionalism', a modern state-making enterprise leading up to the 1911 revolution and the birth of the Republic of China, a dramatic but anticipated change. However, it took another three decades to fully bring the Qing palace machine to a close, when Puyi abdicated as Emperor of Manchukuo in 1945.

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