

# THE END OF ORIGINALITY (AS THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY KNEW IT)

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Whereas expressions of originality and difference dominate aesthetic discourse in the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), interest in these ideals just barely continues into the early Qing (1644-1911). As the new Manchu state sought to legitimize itself in the eyes of its Han Chinese subjects, it established controlling social and cultural policies that seemed to align the state with the traditional values of the intellectual and political Han elite, but in fact favored predictability and sameness for easy governance.

This political stance is reflected in the aesthetic criticism of the time. Early Qing critics find various ways to change the seventeenth-century paradigm. Some transform the positive values of bold difference and newness associated with originalist style art to negative values of confrontational difference and defiance. Others denigrate it, dismiss it, or ignore it altogether, and offer instead a discourse of pabulum disguised as traditional literati values. This paper examines what happened and why.

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*Light refreshments will be served. All are welcome.*