

QIANLONG BATTLE PRINTS

Introduction

The Qianlong reign (1736-1795) was highlighted by an enormous expansion of its territories. The Emperor marched, fought and patrolled his land from Sichuan, Nepal, Burma, Taiwan (Formosa) all the way to Vietnam. There were to be ten military campaigns throughout his territories during his reign.

As the Chinese Emperors often did, Qianlong presented these military campaigns as triumphs. In some cases, regardless of event facts.

In Chinese tradition, Qianlong was a patron of the arts and science. There were many Jesuit priests among his court staff.

The Jesuit priests had already proven their worth with knowledge in the fields of cartography, mathematics, science, architecture and the arts.

In 1773 the Jesuit order was suppressed by the Pope under pressure of the French, Spanish and Portuguese rulers. However, this order never reached the Chinese and thus the Jesuit priests were able to continue to do their work under the safeguard of the Chinese court.

Qianlong had, at his court, a number of Jesuit priests who were very gifted and skilled in the arts of painting and astronomy. The known Italian Jesuit Castiglione and the French Jesuit Benoist were amongst them. In the story of the copper plate engravings offered here, they play an important part.

During the reign of Kangxi, (1662-1722) copperplate prints were made at the Chinese court by a missionary called Matteo Ripa. These prints depicted scenes of gardens and palaces, but battlefields were not a topic...yet. After Kangxi died, the craft of the copperplate prints was lost.

When Qianlong was shown copper prints from Germany he decided to use this medium to eternalize his military triumphs. He ordered Castiglione and his colleagues to make 'drawings' of significant events of his military campaigns. These drawings were sent to Paris, to the Royal Engraver Monsieur Cochin Beauvais. Beauvais was put in charge of this enormous project. He enlisted the services of 4 copper engravers to make the plates according to Castigliones example. The copper was ordered from England and the paper was especially made in size by Monsieur Prudhomme.

There were 16 plates in total. The first 4 examples by Castiglione and his colleagues arrived in Paris in December 1766. The order was to make copper plates, and 200 prints of each plate. The copper originals with 100 prints per plate were then sent back to Beijing. Thus safe-guarding 100 copies of the print still in Paris, should the ship not survive the journey.

The first prints came back to Beijing in 1770. The last ones in 1775. Many prints were lost during the journey.

The Taiwan Campaign Prints

Qianlong was an impatient man. Luckily his court staff consisted of many skilled and gifted artists; The Jesuit astronomer and artist Benoit being one of them. Benoit had proven his skills many times and had a.o. designed the famous 'clock' fountain at the Summer Palace. Qianlong had decided that Benoit was the right person to take up the task of setting up a copper plate studio at the Imperial court in Beijing. In 1769 Benoit had started this craft by making maps in copper plates. The Emperor was very satisfied and ordered further plates to be made. After Father Benoists death in 1774, his pupils followed his strict teachings and continued to make the copper prints in the Jesuit European tradition.

All later copper etchings were then made at the Imperial Court. As are these prints of the Taiwan campaign in 1788-89 and the Vietnam campaign. The Chinese text was later added by woodblock printing.

Of the Taiwan campaign, there were depictions made in three different media, each made for a different purpose.

There were several watercolours made on paper, meant for the archives.

One set was made in lacquer. The purpose for them was to be put on the walls of the Great Purple Hall. This reception hall was the area where the representatives of the vassal states of China were admitted and awaited the audience of the Emperor. They were thus surrounded and confronted by the depictions of the conquering of their lands by the Qing Emperor.

The copper prints of which more could be made, were given to chosen subjects as gifts, royal libraries and distributed among the various palaces.

The original series of the Taiwan campaign consists of 12 prints, of which we have 4:

- Attack on the Douliumen
- Conquer of Daliyi
- Capture of the Rebel Chief Lin Shuangwen
- Crossing of the Ocean & Triumphant return

The Taiwan series is one of the most important and sought after.

The Chinese - Taiwan history

Taiwan was of old a place of smugglers, pirates and aborigines.

The Portuguese however thought it to be an 'Ilha Formosa' (Beautiful Island) and tried to establish commercial ports along the coast. However, they were soon driven off by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). They had set up shop there and traded from the Taiwan Strait with Batavia, China and Japan. The Ming Emperor did not like their hold on the trade and tried to make them leave. The Dutch however would not and built Fort Zeelandia on the Pengu Islands.

The VOC hired many Han Chinese to work the fields for them. During this period, the Mantsjoerians took hold of China and Beijing and the Qing reign had become a fact. A Ming-loyalist named Koxinga, living in exile near Formosa, had befriended a disgruntled old VOC worker and together they raised an army to push the Dutch off the island.

They succeeded and in 1661 the Dutch left Formosa. Koxinga brought 30.000 Chinese men with him and they settled in Taiwan. During the following years the Chinese population on Formosa steadily grew.

Koxinga himself died a year after his success. His sons and grandsons made a mess of governing the island though, and in 1683 the Qing Emperor made an end to the Zheng rule, placing Taiwan under Chinese rule.

Corruption and discontent still continued to rule in Taiwan and in 1788-1789 the Qing Emperor stepped in with the great Taiwan Campaign. Which is the subject of these copper prints.

The individual prints

Attack on the Douliumen (Zhulou)



The city of Zhulou, was an important city and one of the few to have a defence wall. Its strategic position between the north and south of the island, made the city of vital military importance.

In 1787 the Rebels had taken the city, and the Qing army had surrounded the area and no one was able to get in or out of the city walls. Hunger and lack of ammunition were starting to take its toll.

On 16 December, Chinese reinforcements came and in a single day, the Qing Emperor attacked and took the city. Zhulou was in Chinese hands.

Conquer of Dali



The rebels had set up their headquarters in the area of Daliyi. In order to protect themselves against musket and canon fire, they had built a series of walls around their encampment. Walls of bamboo and earth were packed tightly together to form a shield.

However, they were not able to defy the Qing army. With strategic clever warfare, the large number of soldiers and the fire power, the rebels were defeated. The Qing army annihilated the city and captured or killed all men that had survived the attack.

Capture of the Rebel Chief Lin Shuangwen



The rebel leader Chief Lin Shuangwen was captured in 1788. In the wake of his capture, all his possessions were confiscated and all related family were taken. Even the graves of his ancestors were disgraced and the male members of his family were castrated. The bloodline ended.

On the left side of the print, you can see the capture of the leader. He is depicted with chains around his neck and hands.

The print shows the native inhabitants of the island defending themselves against the rebels, the rebels being cornered by the Qing army and army officials congratulating each other with the capture of the rebel leader.

Triumphant return



The rebellion was defeated and the army returned home in triumph. The islands depicted in the background of the print is Taiwan, the formation of rocks in the water on the left side of the print is the Penghu islands.

The land on the far right of the print is meant to depict Chinese soil. The convoy of boats filled with Chinese army men implies the victory of the army.

General details:

Size: 55 x 87 cm each

China, printed at the Forbidden City, 1788 – 1789

Price of the 4 prints: Euro 45.000,--

Literature:

- Butz, Herbert (Hrsg.). 2003. *Bilder für die „Halle des Purpurglanzes.“ Chinesische Offiziersporträts und Schlachtenkupfer der Ära Qianlong (1736-1795)*. Mit Beiträgen von Annette Bügener, Rui Magone und Erling von Mende. Ausstellung des Museums für Ostasiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, vom 18. Juli bis 12. Oktober 2003. Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst.
- Pirazzoli-T'Serstevens, Michèle. 1969. *Gravures des Conquêtes de L'Empereur de Chine K'ien-Long au Musée Guimet*. Paris.
- Spee, Clarissa von. 2010. "The Printed Image in China from the 18th to the 21st Centuries". London, The British Museum Press.
- Waley-Cohen, Joanna. 1992. "God and Guns in Eighteenth-Century China: Jesuit Missionaries and the Military Campaigns of the Qianlong Emperor (1736-1795)." In: *Contact between Cultures* 4: 94-99.

The Vietnam campaign (1786 – 1789)

Vietnam (Annam) was a highly important province of China. In 1788, the ruling Le-Dynasty was threatened by a competitive Clan. The members of the ruling dynasty fled to the Qing court in search of help and safety.

The Qianlong Emperor sent the family home, accompanied by three army legions. One via Yunnan, one via Guangdong and one via the Lake.

The Le-Dynasty was restored to its power, however one month later they were put aside again. The new ruling powers, with help from the French, sent the Qing army back to Beijing and the Emperor accepted the new status quo. Thus the Emperor lost the battle but to save face, implied it was still a battle won.

Of the Vietnam campaign, copper prints were made in series of 6. The British Museum has one single copper print in their collection

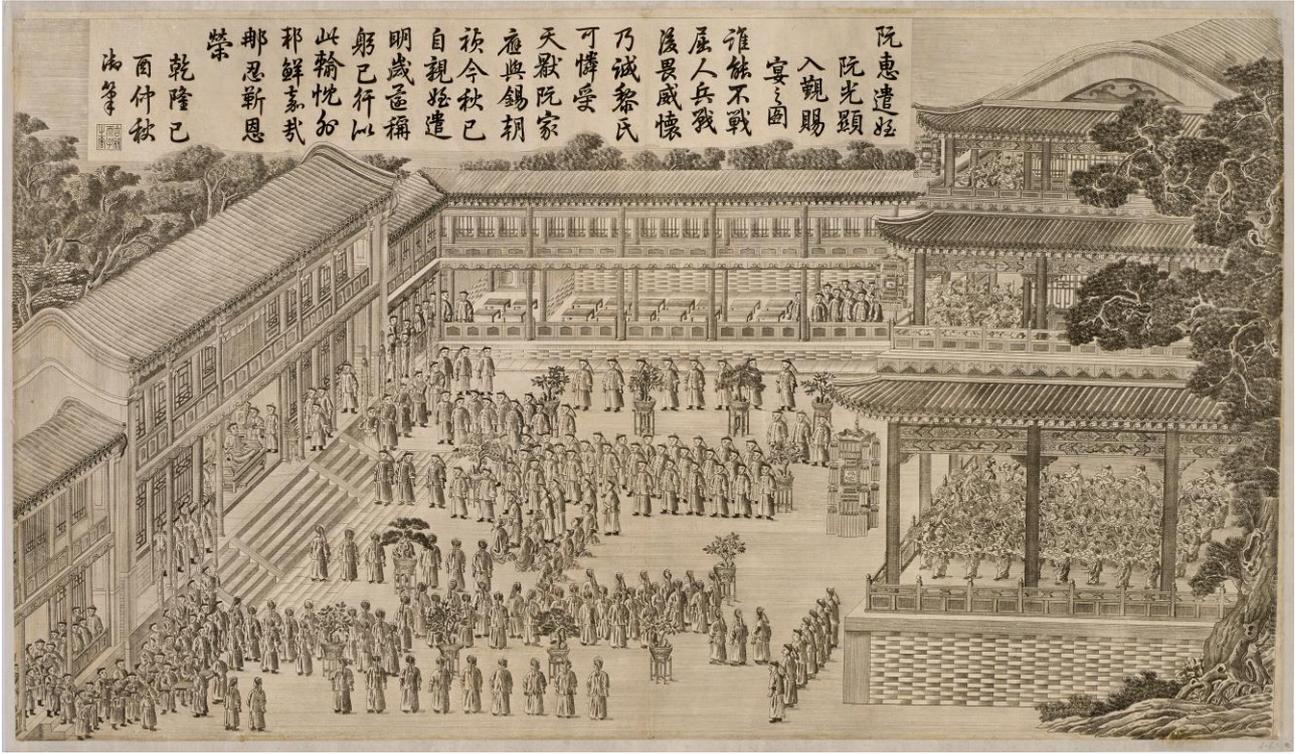
We have two prints from this series.

The Battle at the river Thi-cau



Under the cover of night, the Chinese were able to 'roll-out' a make-shift bridge from one side of the river to the other. However wild and rapid the river seemed to be, the Qianlong army managed to cross the river by foot, horse and boat. Thus surprising their enemies.

The audience at the Forbidden City



After the battle was lost by Qianlong, the cousin of the new Vietnamese ruler, was sent to the Forbidden City to pay their respects to the Emperor. The print shows the ambassadors kneeling before the Emperor.

General details:

Size: 55 x 87 cm each

China, printed at the Forbidden City, 1789 – 1790

Price of the 2 prints: Euro 22,000--

Literature:

- Butz, Herbert (Hrsg.). 2003. *Bilder für die „Halle des Purpurglanzes.“ Chinesische Offiziersporträts und Schlachtenkupfer der Ära Qianlong (1736-1795)*. Mit Beiträgen von Annette Bügener, Rui Magone und Erling von Mende. Ausstellung des Museums für Ostasiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, vom 18. Juli bis 12. Oktober 2003. Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst.
- Gaspardone, Prof. Emile. 1954. "Les Victoires d'Annam aux Gravures de K'ien-Long" in *Sinologica – Zeitschrift für chinesische Kultur und Wissenschaft / Review of Chinese Culture and Science*. Volume IV, Nr. 1. Basel. Page 1 – 13.
- Pirazzoli-T'Serstevens, Michèle. 1969. *Gravures des Conquêtes de L'Empereur de Chine K'ien-Long au Musée Guimet*. Paris.
- Spee, Clarissa von. 2010. "The Printed Image in China from the 18th to the 21st Centuries". London, The British Museum Press.
- Waley-Cohen, Joanna. 1992. "God and Guns in Eighteenth-Century China: Jesuit Missionaries and the Military Campaigns of the Qianlong Emperor (1736-1795)." In: *Contact between Cultures* 4: 94-99.