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Mid-Qing Arts and Jesuit Visions: Encounters and Exchanges in Eighteenth-Century Beijing pp.146-161

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Established in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, the Society of Jesus quickly became one of the most active early modern religious institutions, and the only Catholic order that set up its missionary work through a worldwide communication system. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, with the open support of the Holy See, the Jesuits entered China through European trade routes to Asia. In 1601 the Jesuit Father Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) obtained permission to reach Beijing, and consequently secured a Jesuit post in the capital of the Ming empire. The richness and vastness of the country, coupled with an intellectual culture that the Jesuits found comparable to Europe in terms of its antiquity, “morality,” and literary knowledge, made China a promising ground for Catholic evangelization. However, the first missionaries like Ricci soon realized that their work could be realized only by means of a broad cultural adaptation that encompassed learning the Chinese language and in turn the local literary culture. Adaptation was indeed part of the Society’s missionary strategy: first, the Christian message had to penetrate the ruling elites in order to spread to the entire society.¹ For this reason the Jesuit order cultivated

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¹ For an interesting overview on the Jesuit missionary enterprise, see Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

the interchange with the Chinese imperial house by offering to the Qing rulers the services of various individuals from Europe. These individuals, mostly members of the Jesuit order, were equipped with theoretical and practical knowledge in different fields, from astronomy to painting, from the production of firearms to medicine. By the early 1700s, the Jesuits had already acquired a century of experience in China, and had been embedded at the Qing court since the fall of the previous Ming dynasty in 1644. In practical terms, the Jesuits—together with few clerics from other missionary orders present in eighteenth-century China—became the protagonists of a unique intercultural exchange, which was primarily performed and negotiated within the walls of the imperial palaces in Beijing.

The Imperial Store of Knowledge

At the end of the seventeenth century, the global fortunes of the Jesuits in the Chinese capital coincided with the interests of the mid-Qing emperors in the fields of astronomy, calendric studies, and mathematics. Such a dialogue, made viable by the appointment of Jesuit members to imperial administrative positions in Beijing, had commenced during the Shunqi era (1644-1661) with the employment of Adam Schall (1591-1666), a German Jesuit on the imperial Board of Astronomy. His successor in the same board, the Flemish Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688), explicitly addressed the Jesuit order about the unique opportunity of exploiting the Kangxi Emperor's request for highly specialized experts from Europe, as a means of embedding a group of Jesuits in the core of the imperial household in Beijing.² Verbiest specifically stated that members of the order sent to

² Henry Josson and Leopold Willaert, *Correspondance de Ferdinand Verbiest de la Compagnie de Jésus (1623-1688) Directeur de l'Observatoire de Pékin* (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1938); for Verbiest's

China had to be capable of comprehending courtly language and serving in the imperial workshops (fig. 1).

Throughout his life, Kangxi (1654-1722) expressed a great curiosity about Western science, art, and technology, including mathematics and its applications. He was also involved in commissions of enamels and clocks, and fascinated by European medicine. Therefore, it was no surprise to the Jesuits when, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the emperor and his retinue honored them with a visit to the French mission's compound to enjoy a peculiar visual display. The show had been organized by Filippo Maria Grimaldi (1638-1712), who, from 1688 was—as the successor to Verbiest—director of the Board of Astronomy and Mathematics and thus an imperial official himself. As a mathematician and astronomer, Grimaldi was comfortable with the geometrical delineation of optical wonders. On this occasion, he planned to amaze his imperial audience by deceiving the sight through anamorphosis, peep shows, and magic lanterns. The Jesuits invited the emperor and his entourage into the garden: on every wall was a painted landscape fifty feet long, filled with mountains, forests, and wild animals. It was an homage to one of the most valued activities of the Manchu elite: hunting as a metaphor for warfare and authority. The walls were irregular, with doors and windows breaking their surfaces, further stimulating the eye to wander, looking for consistency, patterns, and interesting details. However, there was more. The Jesuit fathers invited their guests to stand close to one side of each wall. There, if viewed from a certain angle, the painted landscape morphed into a human figure; thus, two different images were contained in one depiction. On the walls of the French mission, Grimaldi had created

observations, see 230-253, 234, 238.

anamorphic pictures: optically deformed images that accelerate the optical perspective and can be perceived only if viewed from a specific angle. Anamorphosis can also be viewed by deploying “conical, cylindrical, or pyramidal mirrors to rectify the vision.”³ The Jesuits provided such an optical set to the emperor and his officials, and as a finale to the gathering, the visit ended with the viewing of architectural drawings in books taken from the shelves of the French mission’s bountiful library. If the anamorphic images were intended to amuse, the architectural drawings were meant to display the culture that lay behind the drawn lines: geometry, mathematics, and their applications such as perspective, architecture, astronomy, and cartography. The Jesuits reasoned that if they could convince the Kangxi Emperor that all of this represented the ultimate means to describe the world, then it would not be difficult to bring the Manchu elites to a comprehension and love of God—the source of these mathematical wonders.

However, Kangxi did not follow the monotheistic cultural view from Europe. He was sufficiently well informed to develop a comprehensive opinion about the potential uses of geometry and mathematics, without being bound to metaphysical explanations that had no foundation in Chinese thought. As a Qing emperor, his role was to mediate and control, not revolutionize. Moreover, his duty was to make it possible for the Jesuits’ visual and textual knowledge to be stored by means of local languages—Manchu and Chinese—without suppressing local traditions. From this perspective, the teaching of European knowledge systems was what Kangxi primarily supported. When men like Grimaldi arrived at court, the emperor’s first concern was to assign them apprentices

³ The optical reception in the French garden is described by Jean Baptiste Du Halde in his *Description Géographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique, et Physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (Paris: P. G. Le Mercier, 1736), 3 vols., vol. III, 332-336; for the quotation, see 335.

whose task was to study and document the foreign erudition. The emperor's goal was to transform alien expertise into local competences in order to create a shared store of knowledge.

In the first decade of the eighteenth century, the emperor was looking for a skillful painter from Europe. Certainly, Europeans like Grimaldi at the Board of Astronomy could successfully deceive the eye with anamorphosis—but in the end they were mathematicians, not professionally trained painters. Kangxi was interested in hiring someone who could display, explain, and transmit all aspects of the Western canon of painting. By 1705, the well-informed Jesuits at the Qing court, always aware of the emperor's wishes, had identified a promising candidate in Europe: Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), a young professional painter from Milan.⁴ After accepting the position, he was taken into the Jesuit order as a lay brother and dispatched to China as quickly as possible—a process that, though expedited, still required several years.⁵ In 1712, Grimaldi, author of the anamorphic display, died. In the Jesuits' subsequent audiences with the emperor, Kangxi insistently asked for the famous Castiglione, promised by the Fathers. The Jesuits in turn guaranteed that he was on his way and would arrive soon, but the arduous journey and other obstacles slowed his arrival. It was a difficult situation for the missionaries at court. The emperor would have to wait another three years for a professional painter from Europe, and his impatience would only increase.⁶

⁴ On Castiglione's life and oeuvre, see the author's "la famille de Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766)" and "Les peintures génoises de Giuseppe Castiglione," in Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, *Giuseppe Castiglione 1688-1766: Peintre et architecte à la cour de Chine*, (Paris: Thalia, 2007), 18-25.

⁵ On Castiglione's mission, see the author's "Reconciling Two Careers: The Jesuit Memoir of Giuseppe Castiglione, Lay Brother and Qing Imperial Painter," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42 no. 1: 45-59.

⁶ Evidence on the delayed transfer of Castiglione to China may be found in the Jesuit Archive in Rome, the *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu* (henceforth ARSI); see Goa 9, vol. II, 500-501 r./v., April 6 1713, April 18, 1713.

Finally, in 1715, Castiglione crossed through the heavy doors of the Forbidden City. The newly arrived Milanese artist had come to answer questions, and perhaps demonstrate some of his painting skills. Kangxi was eager to test him personally. Castiglione presented the emperor with a painting of a dog, and in response to Kangxi's request, painted the picture of a bird on the spot. We do not know what the emperor thought of these two pictures. However, Jesuit sources affirmed that the emperor was impressed by the realism of the bird, and that he promptly assigned Castiglione a few disciples. The emperor's questioning was very detailed: Kangxi asked Castiglione if he could paint portraits and produce perspective paintings. Castiglione humbly replied that he "can depict human figures and for the rest he knows a little."⁷

It is not clear if Kangxi liked Castiglione's paintings or not. Of the known surviving works dating to his reign, only a fan painted in collaboration with a local court artist is likely to display traces of Castiglione's own hand.⁸ One can be sure, however, that Castiglione's expertise in the arts of Europe was not wasted; the support received from the emperors who succeeded Kangxi demonstrated that, from the very beginning, Castiglione's knowledge successfully merged with the experience of the local artists.

Controlling Visual Diversity

After the death of Kangxi in 1722, Castiglione's career took a new turn. The transition of power revealed that the new Yongzheng Emperor (雍正, 1723-1735)—and in turn the

⁷ The episode is recounted in Castiglione's posthumous memoir, *Memoria postuma*, ARSI (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu), Bras. 28, 92 r.- 93 v, 92.

⁸ The painting depicts the training of a horse on the northern borders. Castiglione probably painted the horse and Jiao Bingzhen the landscape. See the catalogue *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting. The Collections of the Nelson Gallery, Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art and Indiana University Press, 1980), 354.

Qing imperial household—considered Castiglione’s versatility and artistic knowledge particularly precious. This was evident in the remarkable fact that in the mourning period after Kangxi’s death—a time when the Jesuits employed by the past emperor, as well as the majority of the officials, were forbidden to enter the court—the new emperor authorized Castiglione’s access to the Forbidden City to work on his painting commissions. Along with Castiglione, the only other European receiving such authorization was Father Angelo di Borgo S.Siro (?-?), an Italian clockmaker.⁹ It is this pair, whose skills—clock-making and painting—at first glance seem unrelated, who represent the seed of what would later become the architectural commission for the Yuanming Yuan, the Garden of Perfect Brightness.

At this point, however, Castiglione was still occupied with strengthening his position at court. During Kangxi’s reign, he was employed as an enamel painter—surely a less prominent role than executing painting commissions received from the emperor in person. However, Castiglione was in Beijing to stay; eventually enamels came into fashion at court, and his firm hand in painting minuscule pictures on enameled pieces was highly valued (figs. 2 and 2a). As a professional artist, he knew perfectly well what he had to learn in his first years in China: the language of Chinese court painting; what pleases the emperor; how the painting workshops are organized; and the procedures for submitting paintings to the throne. This was indeed a time-consuming task, especially when coupled with the duties of instructing imperial household apprentices, and with evenings perhaps devoted to Jesuit commissions. In his paintings for the throne, no

⁹ See *Catalogus Missionariorum, qui actu existent in Imperio Sinarum*, APF (Archivio Propaganda Fide), *Scritture riferite nei congressi – Indie Orientali, Cina, 1723*, 559 v.

Christian images or themes from European political and literary culture were permitted. Castiglione was obliged to learn the aesthetic language of the Qing.

However, things turned out well for him. After an initial tenure in the enamels workshop, Castiglione began to have serious problems with his sight, and convinced the Yongzheng Emperor that the saturated environment of the workshop might well ruin his eyes forever.¹⁰ Castiglione was at that point already working on several commissions for the emperor, including murals and scroll paintings utilizing a variety of techniques, mediums, and materials. Slowly, the Milanese artist began to understand the emperor's taste, and in turn his paintings were rewarded with gifts. In November 1723, Yongzheng demonstrated his approval for a mural painting—at present unknown—by giving Castiglione silk, meals from the imperial table, and one of his own hats.¹¹ As such gestures indicate, the Italian painter quickly became a favored individual at court, a status that soon earned him the rank of civil official.

Like other painters in the imperial household workshops, Castiglione entered the service of the emperor on recommendation—though a very particular sort of recommendation, coming from the Jesuits. As a European Castiglione did not receive a formal salary but, as with the mentioned fortunate commission for Yongzheng, successful achievements meant gifts and special benefits. On the other hand, irritating the imperial patron with inadequate works or an unproductive pace could mean penalties or even

¹⁰ This information is given by Matteo Ripa in a letter written in Naples after his return to Italy. APF, Scritture riferite nei congressi – Indie Orientali, Cina, Miscellanea 17, 633, October 6, 1725. Yongzheng's employment of Castiglione as a painter of architecture is also documented in Anita Chung, *Drawing Boundaries: Architectural Images in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 52.

¹¹ The list of gifts, along with information about the commission, are in Fondo Gesuitico, Biblioteca Nazionale, Rome, Nuovi riscontri dalla Cina, 1723, ms. 1254, n. 31, 315 r.-318 r., 315 v- 316 r.

dismissal.¹² Castiglione thus became a professional court painter, a huahuaren (畫畫人, painter of paintings), working from seven in the morning to five in the evening, his spare time devoted to fulfilling Jesuit commissions, obligations, and routines.

In the Yongzheng era, the cultural diversity embodied at court by Castiglione and other Europeans began to be indirectly represented, at the emperor's behest, not merely as the mute storing of foreign knowledge, but as a visually controlled diversity. Ruling over a multi-ethnic empire required maintaining equilibrium among ethnic differences while defending the Manchu ethnicity and its right to rule. One of the reasons for the mid-Qing emperors' success was the containment of the empire's substantial cultural differences through the act of storing foreign knowledge. The emperors also commissioned pictures that drew on imagery representative of the various religious and cultural entities present within China: Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, and the ethnic groups defined as Mongolians, Chinese, Manchu, Uyghur, and Tibetan. In keeping with this strategy, the Jesuits in Beijing appeared to the emperor as useful agents of one of many cultural entities—European—to be contained and controlled within the Qing Empire. Such practices of acquisition and incorporation—which were seen as required acts of government—might reach the very image of the emperor himself.¹³ In fact, the emperor could be pictured in the guise of different cultural, ethnic, and religious identities without ridicule to his imperial persona. In an album by an anonymous court artist, for instance, Yongzheng enjoys thirteen such transformations: in one image, for

¹² Yang Boda, "The development of the Ch'ien-lung painting Academy" in Alfreda Murck and Wen C. Fong (eds), *Words and Images* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 333-356, 345.

¹³ Wu Hung, in discussing important aspects of this Qing policy, pertinently states that: "...efforts, which ensured the cultural and artistic continuity, were themselves carefully calculated political acts." Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), 200.

example, he is a Taoist priest awakening a dragon from hibernation; in another, he is a bewigged European chasing a tiger (fig. 3). If Kangxi's dialogue with the Europeans in Beijing was centered on the control of knowledge and acquisition of data, the image of his son in a European wig displayed the control of images by means of paintings or texts. The Yongzheng Emperor used his own image to display the Qing supremacy over cultural, political and religious diversity.

Such a performance was partly mirrored by Castiglione's professional life at court: by this point, the Milanese was both a European painter and a Qing artist. In Castiglione's case, however, the control of his own image was the product of a forced adaptation requiring a real transformation: he had to answer to a Chinese name, Lang Shining; wear Manchu silk robes; and speak Chinese. His understanding of the language was of primary importance. Thus equipped, already in the first years of his engagement at court under Yongzheng, Castiglione met his forthcoming imperial patron, Prince Hungli, the future Qianlong Emperor. The young prince knew the artist very well, having been a four-year-old boy when the Italian entered the service of his grandfather, the Kangxi Emperor. Hungli had been accustomed to roam the imperial painting workshops, and it is not difficult to imagine the young prince becoming familiar with Castiglione's work. When, in 1735, he ascended the throne with the name of Qianlong, he was twenty-four years old, and he knew perfectly what the status of the Italian artist within the imperial painting workshops should be. In the first year of his reign, he commissioned two very important pictures from Castiglione: the accession portrait depicting the emperor in formal robe with the symbols of imperial power, and a hand scroll that portrays the young

emperor flanked by his noble consorts.¹⁴ The Italian painter had become the creator and guardian of the image of the imperial persona.

However, the patronage of Qianlong extended beyond the trust conferred on Castiglione in portraiture. The emperor wanted to demonstrate that he could traverse, undamaged, the cultural boundaries represented by foreign painting techniques. Unlike his father, who required stylistic consistency in his commissioned artworks, Qianlong gave Castiglione the freedom to incorporate Italian painting fundamentals in Qing scrolls. This occurred especially in commissions that required teams of painters to complete. For example, when Castiglione and other imperial artists worked on a portrait of the emperor reviewing the troops—an oversized painting intended to be glued to the wall of the imperial palace—he was free to paint part of the composition in an Italian style.¹⁵ In fact, two sections of the landscape, the sky and lower left corner of the foreground, are completely disjointed from the space depicted in the rest of the work, which is painted by local artists, in the Chinese manner, with small touches of the brush (fig. 4). By contrast, the sky is painted in the European style, with blended colors and delicate clouds, and the plants in the foreground corner are meticulously delineated in chiaroscuro. The figure of the emperor on horseback is painted by Castiglione in soft shades to render the texture of Western realism, and it floats over this landscape, having no shadow to anchor it to the ground. Even today, this spatial and pictorial variety within a single work offers a challenge to Western viewers. When looking, for instance, at the thangka depicting

¹⁴ For the Castiglione accession portrait, today in the Palace Museum in Beijing, see Zhang Hongxing, ed., *The Qianlong Emperor: Treasures from the Forbidden City* (Edinburgh: National Museum of Scotland, 2002), 36. On the handscroll of Qianlong with the noble consorts, now in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art, see Wai-kam Ho, ed., *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collections of the Nelson Gallery* (Indiana: Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art, 1980), 355.

¹⁵ On this commission see Zhu Jiajin, “Castiglione’s Tieluo Paintings,” *Oriental Art* 19 no. 11 (1988): 80-83; and Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 275-278.

Qianlong as the Manjugosha Emperor—the emanation of Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom and an important founding symbol of the Manchu tribes—the eye is drawn to the center of the composition, where the emperor’s face, painted by Castiglione, emerges from the colored surface (fig. 5). Only the face is shaded in the European style: all around it sprouts the cosmic vision of a pantheon of Buddhist figures, delineated in the style and colors of the Tibetan tradition. Some have maintained that Castiglione was the victim of a subterfuge—that he was asked to reproduce Qianlong’s face on an empty surface, with the rest of the painting added later. This assumes that as a Jesuit, he would have refused to paint a non-Catholic religious image.¹⁶ We cannot, however, be completely sure that Castiglione did not in fact collaborate with others to produce a work of Buddhist art: at the Qing court, not even a Jesuit could ignore the visual syncretism advanced by Qianlong.

Moving the Flow of Time

In the eighteenth century, Western clocks collected by the mid-Qing emperors and those assembled in a dedicated imperial workshop in Beijing were described with different terms (fig. 6). They were named with reference to their acoustic and mechanical qualities—for instance, ‘zimingzhong,’ (self-sounding bell)—or their origins: ‘xiwu’ (Western things), or ‘yangwu’ (foreign things). Also, clocks displaying automata, such as moving scenery and figures, were called ‘qiqi,’ (strange things) or ‘wanyi,’

¹⁶ Patricia Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 55.

(playthings).¹⁷ Under the Kangxi Emperor, clocks had already become one of the official items that could be given as diplomatic gifts or bestowed upon deserving members of the imperial apparatus, and the Qing household had organized a specific storeroom for them. Imperial clockmakers were charged with the important task of repairing and maintaining the clocks' mechanisms in good working order. It is perhaps for this reason that Yongzheng had allowed Angelo di Borgo S.Siro, along with Castiglione, to continue working during the transitional period when he assumed the throne: the clockmaker had to ensure that the perpetual movements of the precious clocks did not stop. Automata were not seen as different from clocks. According to an eighteenth-century dictionary, both were machines that "contain the source of their motion." More precisely, clocks were considered "ordinary" automata, while automata themselves were considered "extraordinary" and thus more complex mechanisms.¹⁸ Clocks with automata are real "playthings;" they may in fact be considered theatrical stages where, along with the measurement of time, mechanical movements are on display in the form of automatons shaped as animals and figures.

Within this miniaturized space, the painting skills of Castiglione and the knowledge of mechanics based on clock-making technology came together. The two practices could finally provide Qianlong with both a real, three-dimensional space and the forms to fill it. The potential of this development far surpassed the illusion of depth achieved by applying paint to flat surfaces by means of convergent perspective, which the Jesuits had been promoting without success at court. In 1752, for the sixtieth birthday of

¹⁷ Catherine Pagani, "*Eastern magnificence and European ingenuity:*" Clocks of Late Imperial China (2001; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 18-19.

¹⁸ Henri Paulian Aimé, *Dizionario Portatile di Fisica*, (Venice: Silvestro Gatti, 1794), vol. I, 81.

Qianlong's mother, Dowager Empress Chongqing, they prepared a beautiful clock-automata as a gift.¹⁹ The object was a clock with a semicircular mechanical theater composed of three scenes with paintings by Castiglione.²⁰ The stage was filled with moving sculptures, but most interestingly with a basin and a waterfall emptying into it. The basin was a mirror; the waterfall, glass threads so fine that, seen from a distance, they "imitated well" the flow of water. The time was pointed out by a duck in the basin, which moved its beak to indicate the hour.²¹ The clock-theater celebrated not only the dowager empress's birthday, but also the emperor's patronage of an architectural project that had started a few years previously, in 1747, and which by 1752 was still underway: the construction of European-style palaces and landscapes, designed in a hybrid rocaille manner, in a section of the Yuanming Yuan (Garden of Perfect Brightness).²² The term "Yuanming Yuan" first described a portion of imperial land in the northwest part of the capital, which had gardens and pavilions used by the Kangxi Emperor. In 1709, he commissioned the construction of a pleasure palace for his son Yongzheng.²³ When Qianlong assumed the throne, the garden had already been serving as a long-term residence for Yongzheng.

¹⁹ On the European arts and the celebration for the dowager empress see Ellen Uitzinger, "For the Man Who Had Everything: Western-Style Exotica in Birthday Celebrations at the Court of Ch'ien-lung," Leonard Blussé and Harriet T. Zurndorfer, eds, *Conflict and Accommodation in Early Modern East Asia: Essay in Honour of Erik Zürcher* (Leiden-New York-Köln: E.J. Brill, 1993), 216-239.

²⁰ George Robert Loehr, *Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766) pittore di corte di Ch'ien-Lung, imperatore della Cina* (Rome: ISMEO, 1940), 24.

²¹ The clock-automata is described by Amiot. See *Choix des lettres édifiantes* (Paris: Imprimerie de Casimir, 1835), 3 vols, vol. III, 59-68, 67-68.

²² The complex was built in two stages, from 1747 to 1751 and from 1751 or 1753 to 1759. See Michèle Pirazzoli t'Serstevens, "The Emperor Qianlong's European Palaces," *Orientalia* 19 no. 11 (1988): 61-71.

²³ Carroll Brown Malone, *History of the Peking Summer Palaces Under the Ch'ing Dynasty* (University of Illinois, 1934), 43.

The area of the European palaces consisted of several buildings with their enclosed gardens and pavilions, featuring basins, fountains, waterworks and their machinery, as well as aviaries, a maze, and a section with perspective paintings organized as an outdoor theatrical stage.²⁴ The infrastructure of the European buildings was Chinese: wooden columns embedded in brick walls covered by red plaster. The roofs were composed of Chinese glazed tiles of different colors.²⁵ Inside the palaces were trompe-l'oeil paintings made by Castiglione and his assistants; European furniture and Western objects were also on display. The project was in Castiglione's hands, but Michel Benoist (1715-1774), a French Jesuit mathematician and cartographer, also had a crucial role in the enterprise: it was he who planned the engineering and construction of the fountains and complex waterworks. The Western fountains were not secondary elements in the commission of the European section of the Yuanming Yuan: they were the main feature, around which the entire space was constructed. According to a Jesuit source, it was after looking at the engraved image of a European fountain that Qianlong became interested in patronizing a series of Western-style waterworks and architectural projects. The name of Father Benoist came to light at that moment as the one most capable of coordinating the construction of the complex machinery for pumping the water from a reservoir and distributing its flow to the various elaborate fountains.²⁶ Benoist was the "clockmaker" of the Yuanming Yuan, and Castiglione its scenographer.

²⁴ See the fascinating study of the garden and its cultural context by John R. Finlay, "The Qianlong Emperor's Western Vistas: Linear Perspective and Trompe l'Oeil Illusion in the European Palaces of the Yuanming Yuan," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 94 (2007): 159-193.

²⁵ Michel Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, "Europeomania at the Chinese Court: The Palace of the Delights of Harmony (1747-1751), Architecture and Interior Decoration," *The Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 65 (2000-2001): 47-60, 51.

²⁶ Finlay (2007), 161-162.

From the time of Kangxi, the mid-Qing emperors had been accustomed to European fountains, ephemeral architecture, and paintings that utilized European-style convergent perspective.²⁷ The Yuanming Yuan therefore was not commissioned simply for the display of intriguing Western novelties, and only to a certain degree should it be considered a theme-park where a version of Europe was on display. More than this, the garden was a site where the Qianlong Emperor displayed and controlled the movements of foreign mechanisms—the hydraulic apparatus—and Western architectonic views in a space that was in scale with Chinese garden architecture. When the work on the rocaille-style buildings was completed in 1759, in front of the western façade of the largest palace, the Haiyan Tang, was a striking clock-fountain designed by Castiglione and engineered by Benoist. (See frontispiece.) In this instance, the water was not made of glass and mirrors, as in the miniature clock-theater given to the dowager empress in 1752. Instead, it was a real stream of water filling the basin of the fountain. In addition, along either side of the basin was a line of animals in human garb, sculpted in stone with cast-bronze heads. The animals represented the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac, as well as the twelve divisions of the day, and together they functioned as a clock. Every two hours, a different animal spouted water, and at noon they all spouted in concert. It was in such a movement that the Qing command of Western knowledge found its synthesis: imperial time articulated by the twelve animals of Chinese tradition, powered by a European hydraulic machine within a rocaille architectonic frame filled with imperial symbols. Moreover, the hydraulic knowledge coming from Europe was not seen by Qianlong as a good alternative power source for local chronological instruments: the Chinese and Manchu already possessed highly functional water-clocks, or clepsydras, which worked

²⁷ Pirazzoli (2000-2001), 48.

by means of an out- or in-flowing stream of water that measured time or drove the movement of astronomical instruments. The Haiyan Tang clock-fountain celebrated and represented the striking combination of natural and mechanically induced motions: cradling the twelve animals was the stone balustrade of the stairway, used as the river-bed for a controlled flow of water that, from step to step, was collected in the main basin. Water, here, was the visible means of understanding how the collected, regulated flow that represented China met the pumped, forced stream symbolizing Europe.

In Qianlong's reign, the cultural exchange that began with Kangxi's interest in learning Western mathematics and passed through Yongzheng's visual interpretation of diversity assumed its ultimate shape: the control of a hybrid Chinese-European space, exerted by ruling over the intangible movements of water, time, fountains, and architecture. No longer was control a matter of interpreting the passage from two-dimensional pictures to three-dimensional space, but rather the display of three-dimensional life within the enclosed space of the Yuanming Yuan. Consider a painting of Prince Guo (1733-1765), sixth son of the Yongzheng Emperor and half-brother to Qianlong, portraying him in front of a European-style architectonic stage (fig. 7). As the image indicates, the ruling Manchus were comfortable standing, as Manchus, in the imaginary space delineated by foreign pictures. Wigs were no longer needed.²⁸

Evidently, the three mid-Qing emperors and the Jesuits in China were all protagonists in this unique dialogue. However, in a pre-industrial age, the quasi-perpetual movement of such an incredible exchange had little chance of survival. After Benoist's

²⁸ The portrait, owned by the Smithsonian Collections in Washington, is discussed by Finlay (2007), 182-183. Portrait of Hongyan, Prince Guo (1733-1765) mid- to late 18th century, Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, Ink and color on silk, H: 357.0 W: 136.0 cm; China, Purchase--Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and partial gift of Richard G. Pritzlaff S1991.47

death in 1774, the hydraulic machinery became inoperative, and no one at court could repair it: the knowledge was as ephemeral as flowing water.²⁹ Castiglione, designer of the European section of the garden, had died in 1766, eight years before. Today, of the Yuanming Yuan only ruins remain: the principal destruction was suffered in 1860 during the Second Opium War, when Anglo-French troops plundered, burned the buildings, and looted the heads of the animals standing in the zodiac fountain. After that convulsive episode, the Yuanming Yuan descended, like its authors and patrons, into a controlled oblivion.

However, the ruins of the exchange between the mid-Qing emperors and Europe were destined to be rearranged. During the period extending from the foundation of the Chinese republic in 1912 to the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, works of art from the imperial collection stored inside the Forbidden City were studied and copied for the first time. In the third decade of the twentieth century, the idea of a national museum took shape, together with the publication of catalogues and inventories of the works of imperial painters of the Qing dynasty. In this same period, Qianlong re-appeared like a ghost: in a portrait signed 'Lang Shining' by an anonymous painter who forged the style of the Milanese, the Qing emperor is shown riding across a bridge in the imperial park of Beihai, with the White Pagoda in the background (fig. 8). Qianlong, probably followed by one of his sons, is wearing a casual robe and a European pocket-watch with two silk pouches at the waist. The convergent perspective used for the background does not seem to relate to the portraits in the foreground, and no shadows anchor the group to the ground. It is an image fluctuating in all directions, but with very old attributes: clocks from the West, greatly prized by the mid-Qing emperors, and the

²⁹ Malone (1934), 154.

pouches which, in larger sizes, were traditionally used for carrying food for long rides. As remnants of the nomadic Manchu past they stand for a journey that never ends, perhaps toward an indistinct modernity.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the same nomadic and symbolic path surfaced in the shape of the looted bronze heads of the zodiac fountain of the Yuanming Yuan, which had been dispersed to various private collections around the world and more recently sold at auctions. They quickly became visual tags of a new Chinese identity, formed by the memories of the last dynasty, suppressed and then reformulated by means of a new national cultural consciousness developed by different artistic movements in the post-Mao period, in particular during the 1980s. Today, the heads are the subject of interconnected debates on looted art, Western imperialism, Chinese nationalism, and the commodification of cultures. Strikingly, significant voices in such debates have originated from the actual space occupied by the remains of Yuanming Yuan. For instance, in the early 1980s, members of the unofficial art group “The Stars,” including Ai Weiwei, were accustomed to meeting secretly in the garden to read poems amid the rocaille ruins.³⁰ In a way, the Yuanming Yuan and the bronze heads designed by Castiglione did not lose their original ability to move the waters of exchange and estrangement. The twelve zodiac heads of Ai Weiwei’s *Circle of Animals* are in fact part of the same history of dialogue and rupture. Their long pedestals suggest a violent eradication but also a fountain-like spouting, producing a new interpretation of the contested past, and at the same time, a response to the current exploitation of the artistic inheritance of China.

³⁰ First emerging in the late 1970s, The Stars group anticipated the New Wave art movement of 1985.

Illustrations



1. Beijing Ancient Observatory. The observatory was completed in 1442. At the end of seventeenth century the instruments used for astronomical observations were reconstructed under the supervision of the Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest. Photograph by the author.



2. Anonymous artist, painted enamel on metal, bowl with a floral decoration and a bucolic scene, Qianlong period. This object, now in the collection of the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, is a good example of the type of commission received by Castiglione while working in the enamels workshop. As seen here, European themes as well as Chinese subjects were in demand during the eighteenth century.



3. Anonymous artist, Yongzheng as European Killing a Tiger, from "Album of the Yongzheng Emperor in Costumes," 13 portraits, Yongzheng period. Palace Museum, Beijing.



4. Giuseppe Castiglione, The Qianlong Emperor in Ceremonial Armor on Horseback, 1758, Palace Museum, Beijing.



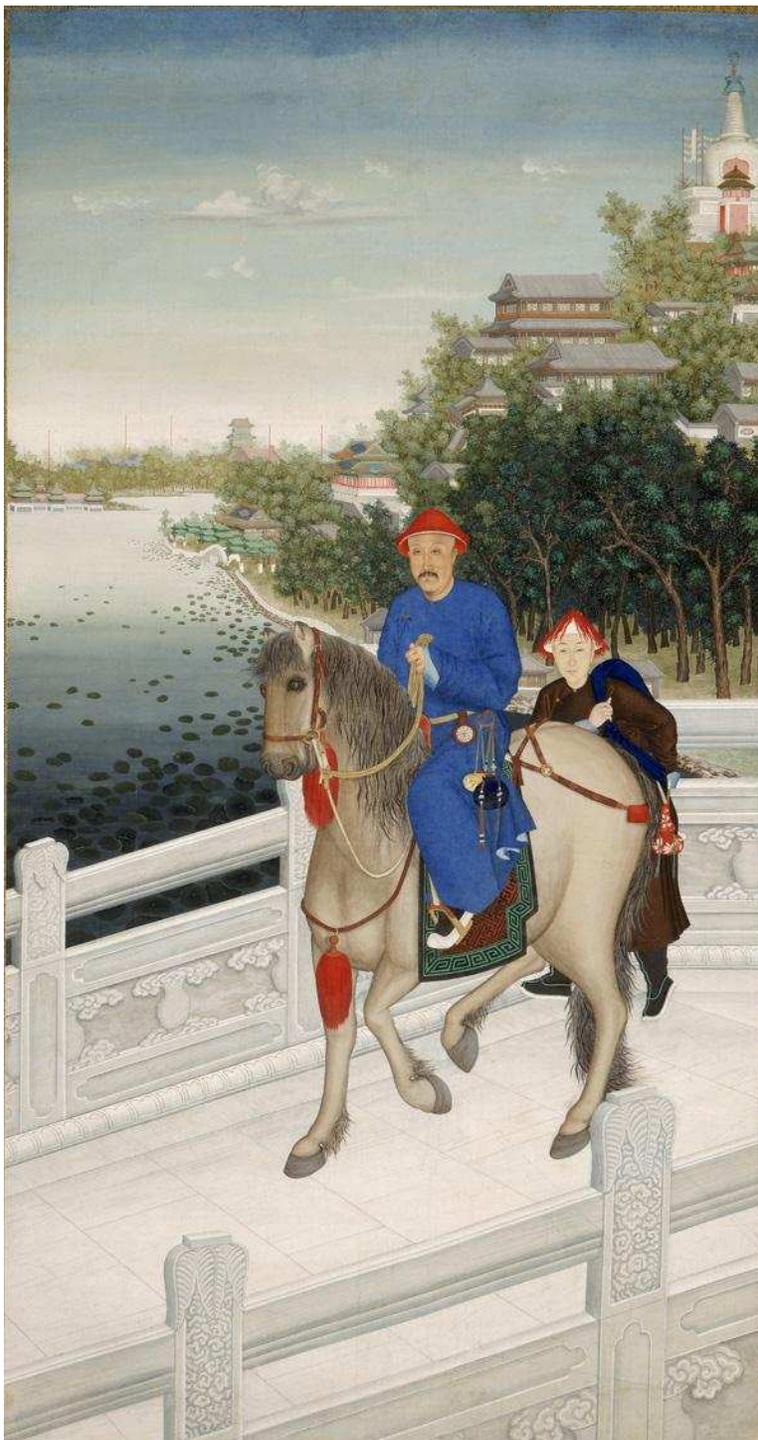
5. Giuseppe Castiglione with others, Qianlong as a manifestation of Manjushri, mid-eighteenth century. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; Purchase-Anonymous donor and Museum funds.



6. James Cox (ca. 1723-1800), Clock in the form of a chariot pushed by a Chinese figure, 1766. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. This object represents the type of clock-automaton highly prized by the mid-Qing emperors, who also collected Chinoiserie from Europe. The Qing interest in the combination of horological and mechanical movements, sculpture, and decoration became one of the means of cultural exchange with Europe.



7. Anonymous artist, Portrait of Hongyan, Prince Guo (1733-1765), mid-eighteenth century. Smithsonian Collections. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; Purchase-Smithsonian Acquisition Program, and partial gift of Richard G. Pritzlaff.



8. Anonymous artist (signed 'Lang Shining'), Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in front of the white pagoda (1920-1930), Smithsonian Collections, Washington. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; Purchase-Smithsonian Acquisition Program, and partial gift of Richard G. Pritzlaff.