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Copper Plates for the Qianlong Emperor: from Paris to Peking via Canton*

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Abstract

In the early 1760s, Jesuit missionaries serving as court artists in Peking were instructed by the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-96) to produce a set of sixteen sketches in celebration of his recent victories over the Mongols and the Turkic Muslims in the region of present-day Xinjiang. The designs that were to be engraved on copper plates and printed in Europe were dispatched from Canton to Paris where the work was executed. Yet it was not until 1777, over a decade after the Qianlong emperor had initiated the project that his order was fully realized and the sixteen original designs, the sixteen copper plates, and 200 prints drawn from each plate, had all arrived in Beijing. This paper explores the politics behind the execution of this unique set of prints.

Keywords

Copper-plate prints, Qianlong, Louis XV, sing-songs, Jesuits, Cohongs

Introduction

This paper is not about art history. Art history, generally speaking, takes the object as its focus even when deconstructing or determining the different ways in which actors might look at, or interact with, that object. Although concerned with how the copperplate prints were viewed, my interest is not the art or artistry but rather the commission as a whole, in which the works of art played but one small part. More disconcertingly perhaps, this paper is not about China's northwest where, to the best of my

* I would like to thank Tanya Szrajber and Mia Jackson of the British Museum for sharing with me their extensive knowledge of these prints and the print-making process. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers at the *Journal of Early Modern History* for their detailed comments on an earlier version of this article.

knowledge the prints have never even been exhibited, nor likely to be. But because perspective and place are invariably intimately bound, the following narrative is structured around the three physical locations most closely connected with the history of the prints: Paris, Canton and Peking.

With the notable exceptions of Paul Pelliot and Tanya Szrajber, Chinese and Western scholars who have made mention of these Qing dynasty (1644-1911) prints have highlighted the cross-cultural nature of the enterprise, emphasizing exchange, cooperation, and artistic fusion.¹ Such links cannot fail to attract the attention of the student of early modern global history, and in general, historians of China, long frustrated by the lingering clichés of China's isolationism and exceptionalism, have welcomed the study of early modernity from a global perspective (opposed to the study of the globalizing character of the early modern European era). Nevertheless, few would deny that while the effort to disentangle late imperial China from the stultifying gossamer of Orientalism and premodern-stagnation may be a worthy cause, to view the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties as part of the early modern world, in the sense of "as modern as Europe," is more controversial.

Any attempts to synchronize China's historical periodization with that of Europe will inevitably invite broad generalizations about political organization and economic life. The early modern framework is no exception, but while there may be concerns that working within its parameters will

¹ Paul Pelliot, "Les conquêtes de l'empereur de la Chine," *T'oung Pao* 20 (1921):185-274; Tanya Szrajber, "The Victories of Qianlong," *Print Quarterly* 23 (2006): 28-47. To give but a few examples of artistic fusion: "fusion des esthétiques européenne et asiatique," Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, *Gravures des Conquêtes de l'empereur de Chine K'ien-Long au Musée Guimet* (Paris, 1969), 5; "a model of the success of Sino-Western cooperation" ("Zhong-Xi jiehe di chengong dianfan 中西結合的成功典范"), in *Qingdai gongting banhua* 清代宮廷版畫 [*Qing Dynasty Imperial Printed Works*], ed. Weng Lianxi 翁連溪 (Beijing, 2001), 24; "a fusion of Eastern and Western painting styles," ("Dong-Xi huihua fengge de ronghe 東西繪畫風格的融合"), Zhuang Jifa 莊吉發, *Qing Gaozong shi quan wugong yanjiu* 清高宗十全武功研究 [*A Study of Qing Gaozong's "Ten Military Victories"*] (Repr. Beijing, 1987), 529; "The conjoining of Chinese-Western artistic methods," ("Zhong-Xi xiang jiehe de huafa 中西相結合的畫法"), Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, *Qianlong pingding Zhunbu Huibu zhantu he Qingdai de tongban hua* 乾隆評定準部回部戰圖和清代的銅版畫 [*The battle scenes of Qianlong's pacification of the Zhungar Mongols and Turkic Muslims and Qing dynasty copperplate engraving*], *Wenwu* 4 (1980): 62; "the most famous example of East-West interaction in the realm of prints," Lothar Ledderose, "Chinese influence on European Art," in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Thomas Lee (Hong Kong, 1991), 227.

lead to a belittling of the importance of ethno-dynastic change or an over emphasis on what Jack Goldstone has termed the Qing “efflorescence” of the eighteenth-century, no construct—be it early modern, late modern, or late imperial—necessarily invalidates or precludes the use of other historical frames of reference.² The contribution of the early modern hypothesis is that it allows us to recognize China as part of an integrated world economy, a world in which empire builders everywhere faced similar fundamental challenges. It provides an analytical framework in which issues of land and labor productivity, and living standards and consumption, may be fruitfully examined to elucidate not just “China in the global,” or vice-versa but, oddly, the very specificity of China. There is, however, a less frequently mentioned downside to the early modern model: the temptation to seek out parallel global patterns in the nooks and crannies of China’s engagement with Europe and to present them as evidence of a teleological passage towards modernity along which China and Europe marched side by side; it is within this impoverished construction of early modernity that the copperplate prints are frequently interpreted.

The narrative of the copperplate prints that tells of cross-cultural exchange and cooperation, topped off with a happy ending, emphasizes China’s openness to foreign influences and portrays the commission as one of mutual benefit. King Louis XV (r.1715-1774) and the Qianlong emperor are presented as equal partners in an early modern world where the two sovereigns, linked by a chain of technicians, merchants, and traders, are consumers of modern technology and patrons of elite culture; feudalistic obligations, patrimonial authority, and autocracy (albeit on the wane) play no part. Conversely, the following account endeavors to provide a fresh reading that impugns these assumptions. While recognizing the global dynamics of the commission and all the subtleties of the interactions that it involved, this narrative seeks to highlight the diverse political agendas and conflicting aspirations that were invested in this extraordinary

² Jack Goldstone, “Neither Late Imperial nor Early Modern: Efflorescences and the Qing Formation in World History,” in *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time*, ed. Lynn Struve (Cambridge, MA, M.A., 2004), 242-302. Goldstone defines the term “efflorescence” as “a relatively sharp, often unexpected upturn in significant demographic and economic indices, usually accompanied by political expansion, institution-building, cultural synthesis, and consolidation” but he notes that growth in these periods is “distinct from Kuznetsian modern economic growth,” 252. Jonathan Hay makes a persuasive case for the pluralistic approach in “The Diachronics of Early Qing Visual and Material Culture,” *ibid.*, 306, 308.

project—the only work of art ever to be executed in the West at the behest of an emperor of China.

Peking (1)

Between 1755 and the early 1760s, Jesuit artists in Peking, possibly assisted by other court artists, executed a series of large paintings depicting the Manchu conquest of the region of Xinjiang.³ The artists themselves had no personal experience of the battles or the topography of the region and the scenes were drawn from memorials and accounts from the field.⁴ Whenever an individual participating in the campaign was received at court, a portrait was made and kept for later use,⁵ so while the early sketches identified officers and generals with their Manchu names written in cartouches above their heads, in the final paintings individual figures could be easily identified.⁶ Clearly, these were not merely imagined battle scenes intended

³ It was Pelliot who in the West first established that these large silk paintings of the campaign were the pictures from which the prints, measuring approx. 57 × 93 cm, were reductions and adaptations. Pelliot, “Les conquêtes,” 271. See also Walter Fuchs, “Die Entwürfe der Schlachtenkupfer der Kielung- und Taokuang-Zeit,” *Monumenta Serica* 9 (1944): 101-102. With the exception of two fragments of the Battle of Qurman (Giovanni Damasceno, 1760, c. 8 × 4m), the silk paintings are no longer extant. While the fragment which has recently come to light in Berlin illustrates a close relationship with the print, the other fragment, held in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg, reveals quite extensive adaptation. See <http://www.battle-of-qurman.com.cn/e/left.htm> (as of April 2, 2009), I am grateful to Tanya Szrajber for this reference. Marcia Reed and Paola Demattè eds., *China on Paper. European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles, 2007), 99; Herbert Butz ed., *Bilder für die “Halle des Purpurglanzes”: Chinesische Offiziersporträts und Schlachtenkupfer der Ära Qianlong (1736-1795)* (Berlin, 2003), 54.

⁴ See the Qianlong emperor’s preface to the album of the prints and accompanying poems (dated spring 1766). For a reproduction of the preface, see Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正 ed., *Qingdai yuzhi tongban hua* 清代御製銅版畫 [*Palace Copperplate etchings of the Qing Dynasty*] (Beijing, 1999). It has been partially translated into French by Pelliot, “Les conquêtes,” 255-256.

⁵ H. Bernard “Le frère Attiret au service de K’ien-long (1739-1768),” *Bulletin de l’université Aurere*, série III, 4, no. 2 (1943): 438-440; also Michèle Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens, *Giuseppe Castiglione 1688-1766: Peintre et architecte à la cour de Chine* (Thalia, 2007), 189.

⁶ Sketches of the Battles of Khorgos and Tonguzluq are held by Tenri University in Tokyo. Sugimura Yüzō, *Kenryū Kōtei* [*The Qianlong Emperor*] (Tokyo, 1961), 123. See also *Chūgoku no yōfuga ten* [*Exhibition of Foreign-Influenced Chinese Pictures*] (Tokyo, 1995),

to glorify the dynasty's victories but a very personal token of remembrance and commemoration between an emperor and his bondsmen (Fig. 1).

The final sixteen paintings were hung in the Ziguangge 紫光阁 (Pavilion of Purple Radiance) in the Forbidden City, along with portraits of meritorious officials and generals responsible for the victories, the emperor's commemorative poetry, memorial tablets, military standards, and captured weapons. And there this story might have ended but for the fact that the Qianlong emperor was apparently shown some prints of battles executed by the Augsburg artist Georg Philipp Rugendas (1666-1742), and he wanted his own victories depicted in similar manner.⁷

In 1762, the renowned Jesuit artist Giuseppe Castiglione (Liang Shining 郎世寧, 1688-1766) and three of his colleagues were instructed to produce sixteen sketches based on the painted scenes; these would be the drafts of the designs for the engravings.⁸

In summer 1765, the emperor ordered that the first four completed designs be dispatched to Canton and from there to Europe to be engraved on copper plates and printed. These developments caused a stir among the Jesuit community in Peking and hardly surprisingly so because this was the first (and last) occasion on which an emperor of China had personally commissioned the production of an artwork of any kind in a European

286 and <http://www.battle-of-qurman.com.cn/e/hist.htm> (as of March 24, 2009). I am grateful to William Ma for pointing out that these sketches, probably for the paintings appear to have been by Chinese artists.

⁷ See Augustin de Hallerstein's letter to his brother of autumn 1765, cited in Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 268-71 and translated by Szrajber, "The Victories," 29-30. Georg Philipp, Rugendas I, was famed for his prints of horsemen and battles, including the siege of Augsburg (1703), but the sources state only "Rugendas," and as Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens suggests the emperor might have seen the prints of Rugendas II (1701-1774) whose works included similar subject matter. Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, *Giuseppe Castiglione*, 191.

⁸ The first four drawings to be completed were: *Aiyushi zhaying* 愛玉史訖(斫)營 ("Ayuxi takes the camp," later known as *Gedeng'ela zhuoying* 格等鄂拉斫營, "Storming the camp at Gädän-ōla") by Castiglione, *Aerchuer zhi zhan* 阿尔楚尔之戰 ("Battle of Arčul") by Jean-Denis Attiret (Wang Zhicheng 王致誠, 1702-1768), *Yili renmin touxiang* 伊犁人民投降 ("Surrender of the people of Yili") by Ignatius Sichelbarth (Ignaz Sichelbart/Sickelbart, Ai Qimeng 艾啟蒙, 1708-1780) and *Huerman dajie* 呼尔满大捷 ("Triumph at Qurman") by Giovanni Damasceno Salutti/Salusti (aka Jean Damascène, An Deyi 安德義, 1727-1781). In total two of the original sixteen designs for the prints were executed by Castiglione, three by Attiret, one by Sichelbarth and seven by Damasceno. The remaining designs are unattributed. See Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 198; Zhuang Jifa, *Qing Gaozong*, 519-520.

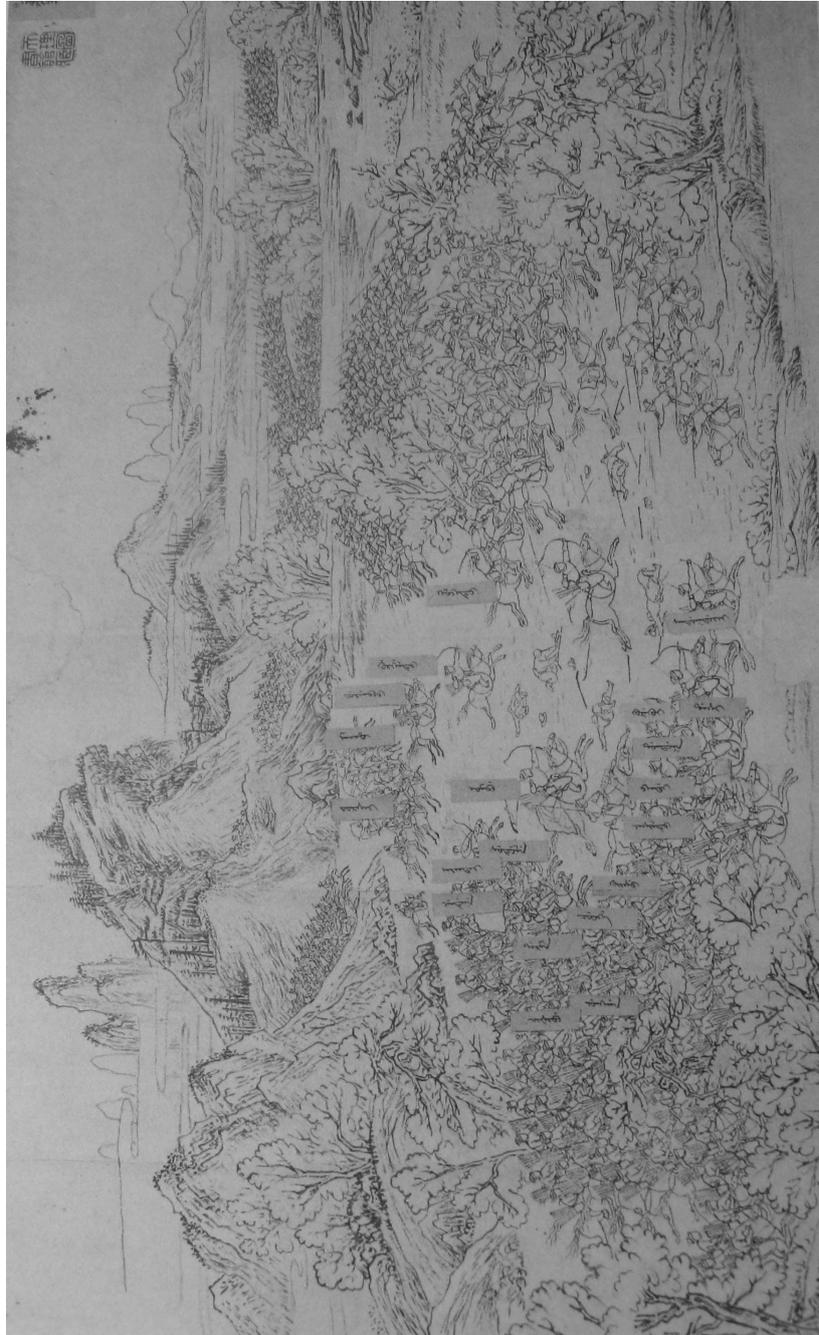


Fig. 1. Sketch of the Victory of Khorgos (c. 1760, draftsman unknown). Courtesy of the Tenri Library.

country.⁹ The emperor's edict of July 13, 1765 sent to the Viceroy of Canton stated that the designs were to be dispatched to a European country to be engraved by the best craftsmen, the engravings were to follow the designs closely, and payment was to be made without delay. The work was to be executed as swiftly as possible and one hundred prints along with the copper plates were to be returned to the court. The first four designs were to be dispatched immediately, and the remaining twelve would follow in batches of four.¹⁰

All too aware of the fragility of their presence at the imperial court, the Jesuits had a vested interest in the successful completion of the commission. A letter written by Castiglione on the same day as the decree, and which accompanied the first four designs sent to Paris, underlined the care and reverence with which the Jesuits hoped the commission would be treated:

... whether the pictures are engraved with the burin or the nitric acid, care should be taken that they are represented on the copper with the utmost and most gracious delicacy, and that the artist proceeds with the greatest accuracy and precision as is required by a work that will be presented again to such a great emperor.

The letter also made it quite clear that the emperor's intention was to produce his own prints from the plates:

... if after (having pulled) the number of copies stipulated in the emperor's decree, the plates appear used or worn, they should of course be retouched and repaired before being sent to China, so that new copies to be pulled in that country, will be as beautiful as the earlier ones.¹¹

⁹ Castiglione apparently favored having the designs sent to Italy. See Hallerstein's letter, Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 271.

¹⁰ Copies of the French translation of the decree are held in the Archives Nationales, Paris (hereafter A.N.) among the files of the Maison du Roi (Ancien Régime) O/1/1924 and O/1/1073, 13.7.1765. Several of the relevant French documents held in the A.N. can be found quoted either in part or in full in *Nouvelles Archives de l'Art Français*, 3rd series, vol. 20 (Paris, 1905); Pelliot, "Les conquêtes"; Szrajber, "The Victories;" and most recently Pascal Torres, *Les Batailles de l'Empereur de Chine: La gloire de Qianlong célébrée par Louis XV, une commande royale d'estampes* (Paris, 2009). In order to standardize references, I provide only the A.N. document reference. I do not use Pelliot's "piece no.," which in many cases no longer accords with the order of the documents in the files and microfilms. Wherever possible, dates are provided.

¹¹ A.N. O/1/1924, 13.7.1765.

The Chinese were, in the eighteenth century, no newcomers to the use of copper in printing. Copper was used for making seals in the third century B.C. and in the Song (960-1279) and the Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties copper plates were used for printing money. Matteo Ricci (Li Madou 李瑪竇, 1562-1610) brought copperplate prints to China in the seventeenth century.¹² In the eighteenth century, the notion of using copper as an alternative to wood-block was given new life when the vast Imperial Encyclopedia the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (1726) was printed using copper moveable type, but the technique failed to take hold.¹³

In the early eighteenth century, the Kangxi emperor (r.1661-1722) had had a series of woodcut prints produced depicting thirty-six vistas in the vicinity of his summer retreat at Chengde 承德, all based on paintings by the artist and one time director of the imperial workshops (*zaobanchu* 造辦處), Shen Yu 沈喻.¹⁴ These prints, each accompanied by an imperial poem, were published in two volumes (*juan* 卷) entitled *Yuzhi bishu shanzhuang sanshliu jingshi tu* 御製避暑山莊三十六景詩圖 (Imperially composed illustrated poems on the mountain hamlet for escaping the summer heat, 1712). But so enamored was the emperor with his summer retreat that he then instructed one of the Jesuits, Matteo Ripa (Ma Guoxian 馬國賢, 1692-1746), who had no practical knowledge of the art, to produce a set of copper plates of the same scenes. Assisted by two Chinese pupils in 1713, Ripa completed the first copper engravings produced in China.¹⁵ Unremarkable by Western standards but considerably

¹² Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, *Qingdai gongting huihua* 清代宮廷繪畫 [Paintings of the Court Artists of the Qing Court] (Hong Kong, 1996), 17.

¹³ In 1744, the copper movable type was melted down and used to make coins. Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (Princeton, 2000), 142.

¹⁴ For a biography of Shen Yu, see Arthur Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)* (Washington D. C., 1943), 330.

¹⁵ Basil Gray, "Lord Burlington and Father Ripa's Chinese Engravings," *British Museum Quarterly* 22 (1960): 40-43. The designs of the copperplate prints, which bear the date Kangxi 52 (1713/14), reproduce those of the woodblock prints. Weng Lianxi, *Qingdai gongting banhua*, 18. The poems and accompanying pictures were published in at least five different forms during the Kangxi period. Weng Lianxi, *Qingdai gongting banhua*, 12, 18; Harmut Walravens, "The introduction of copper-engraving into China," IFLANET Conference Proceedings 1996, <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla62/62-walh2.htm> (as of February 12, 2009). When Ripa visited Britain in 1724, he took a copy of the prints with him and there has been much debate over the question of if and how they may have influenced the growing interest in Chinese gardening in the eighteenth century. See for example, Patrick

superior to the original woodblock prints, some seventy of these prints were then distributed among the emperor's family friends and members of the court. But there were more pressing uses to which the copper engraving could be put. Ripa was now charged with engraving a copperplate version of the Kangxi imperial atlas of China (*Kangxi huangyu quan lantu* 康熙皇輿全覽圖).¹⁶

During the following thirty-forty years, there was little further call for copperplate printing and the craftsmen trained under Ripa had no opportunity to develop or pass on their acquired skill.¹⁷ So, when in the 1760s, the Jesuit Michel Benoist (Jiang Youren 蔣友仁, 1715-1774), head of the French mission in Peking, was ordered to execute new engravings of the imperial atlas to incorporate Siberia and the newly conquered territories of Xinjiang, he could find no one in China with any knowledge of the process to assist him.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, the revised map was considerably less skilful than the earlier work.

If the Qianlong emperor was familiar with his grandfather's *bishu shanzhuang* prints of 1713, when he saw the Rugendas battle scenes he would no doubt have recognized that these were in a different league: the Western engravings displayed a craftsmanship and technique the likes of which simply did not exist in China, even among the Jesuits. More significantly, the aesthetic value of the artistry was coupled with the potential of the copperplate printing for mass production.

Connor, "China and the Landscape garden; Reports, Engravings and Misconceptions," *Art History* 2, no. 4 (1979): 429-440, and a riposte by J. B. Bury, "Letters on Landscape," *Art History* 3, no. 4 (1980): 470-471.

¹⁶ The plates, completed in 1719, were preserved and in 1929, a new edition in forty-one maps was published. Li Xiacong 李孝聰, *Ouzhou shoucang bufen Zhongwen guditu xulu* 歐洲收藏部分中文古地圖敘錄 (Beijing, 1996), 160-163.

¹⁷ It is not entirely clear from the literature and reproductions available whether the lesser known atlas produced during the late 1720s, the *Yongzheng shipai tu* 雍正十排圖, had a copper plate version. See *Qingting da shice quantu ji* 清廷三大實測全圖集 (Beijing, 2007). Ripa had returned to Europe in 1723.

¹⁸ *Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses*, vol. 24 (Paris, 1781), 382-4. For the problems that Benoist had with paper, oil, ink, and cleaning the plates, see Henri Cordier, "Les Correspondants de Bertin," *T'oung Pao* 18 (1917): 338. The copper plates for this atlas, the *Xiefang Qianlong shisanpai ditu*, were found in Beijing in the 1920s and a run was printed in 1931. Li Xiacong, *Ouzhou shoucang*, 175-179; Walravens, "The introduction of copper-engraving."

Canton (1)

By the 1720s, the port of Canton had become the focus of the China trade for all European merchants. Competition was fierce and the Europeans frequently complained about the restrictions under which they labored. Nevertheless, there were substantial profits to be made. By the 1760s, the British and the French, represented by the British East India Company and the French *Compagnie des Indes* (hereafter *Compagnie*) respectively, constituted China's principal European trade partners. The Seven Years War (1756-63) had, however, severely damaged the French company's financial stability and any prospect of redressing its fortunes had to be seized.

As the French representatives in Canton would have been well aware, it was the acting Viceroy, Yang Tingzhang 杨廷璋 (b.1689) who, on the advice of Louis-Joseph Le Febvre (1706-1780) of the Jesuit Mission in Canton, had determined that the designs should be sent to France for engraving.¹⁹ The Viceroy and the Hoppo (the Superintendent of Customs, *yuehai guanbu* 粤海関部),²⁰ then charged the corporation of merchants in Canton (the Cohong 公行)²¹ with executing the commission. Later in 1765, an agreement was drawn up between the representatives of the *Compagnie* and the ten merchants of the Cohong, which stipulated that four copper plates should be engraved and 200 impressions printed from each plate on strong paper.²² This was at variance with the emperor's edict,

¹⁹ Cordier, "Les Correspondants de Bertin," 345-346; Szrajber, "The *Victories*," 33-34. Le Febvre became Supérieur Général of the French Mission in 1762, but resided in Canton for much of the year. Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l'ancienne mission de Chine, 1552-1773*, (Shanghai, 1932-3), 743.

²⁰ The Hoppo, who was appointed by the court to control maritime trade and revenue collection was invariably a Manchu of the imperial clan and during the period with which this article is concerned worked closely with the Viceroys. The term Hoppo comes from the Cantonese pronunciation of *haibu*, a truncated form of *Yuehai guanbu*. For a history of the Hoppo in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see Weng Eang Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton: Chinese merchants in Sino-Western trade* (Richmond, 1997), 193-213; Henri Cordier, "Les Marchands Hanistes de Canton," *T'oung Pao* 25 (1828): 281-315.

²¹ The Cohong was a guild of Chinese merchants (known individually as Hong merchants) who were licensed to handle foreign trade and who acted as a buffer between Chinese officials and the foreign merchants. The corporation of ten merchants was formed in 1760 (after an earlier attempt in the early 1720s).

²² A copy of the Chinese text bearing the names of the ten merchants is held in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (manuscripts orientaux), chinois no. 5231, microfilm 9199. It is quoted in full by Zhuang Jifa, *Qing Gaozong*, 520-521 and a photograph of the document appears in the preface to Nie Chongzheng ed., *Qingdai yuzhi tongban hua*. For French translations, see Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 197-199 and Cordier, "Les Marchands Hanistes

which had requested only 100 prints,²³ and was presumably a precautionary act on the part of the merchants concerned about losses at sea—rather than any desire for personal gain. Two ships, each with one hundred copies of each print and two plates, were to be returned to Canton by the end of 1768. Five thousand taels had been paid to the Compagnie in Canton by the Cohong as an advance, and any outstanding costs were to be paid on completion of the order. The agreement makes no mention of the other twelve designs, but presumably, a similar document was drawn up between the Cohong and the Compagnie's representatives in respect of the subsequent dispatches.²⁴

The increase in the number of prints ordered unilaterally by the merchants is the first indication that handling the commission was not for them an honor but an onerous burden of responsibility and one for which they expected to have to pay in every sense. But it is only in a letter from the Compagnie's representatives in Canton to their Directors in Paris, dated January 10, 1767, that we sense the full measure of that burden:

The honor of having been chosen from amongst all the other nations to decorate the palace of His Imperial Majesty is assuredly very flattering, but it exposes us to burdens that we would have preferred to avoid. The path having been set, we are obliged to follow it and we endeavor only not to be compromised by determining a completion date for the execution or at least to fix such a lengthy term that it will be impossible not to fulfill our undertaking.

The plea that we make here is the more just and more worthy of your attention because it has no bearing on us personally; it is not us who will suffer from any tardiness on your part, but it could effect the ruin of your principal merchants and as a result would certainly rebound on the Compagnie.²⁵

de Canton," 304-306. Although the document is commonly referred to as a treaty or contract (e.g. "ce traité" by Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 197 and Pirazzoli-ri-Serstevens, *Gravures des Conquêtes*, 9 and "the contract" by Szrajber, "The Victories," 32), it bears no signatures or seals and reads more as an instruction (*billet d'obligation*) from the ten merchants, whose names appear at the bottom, to the Company's representatives, Ganzhili (干知里) and Wujialang (武加朗). Pelliot suggests that the latter was probably Vauquelin, who became the French consul in Canton when the post was created in 1776 and that Ganzhili may have been an official of the Compagnie named de La Gannerie. See Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 197-8, n. 4; and Walravens, "The introduction of copper-engraving."

²³ Zhuang Jifa, *Qing Gaozong*, 520. The fact that the initial request was for 100 prints is substantiated in Hallerstein's letter and Benoist's letter to Bertin. See Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 268-271 and Cordier, "Les Correspondants de Bertin," 338-340.

²⁴ I have not been able to find any trace of a subsequent contract.

²⁵ The letter accompanied the dispatch of the twelve subsequent designs. A.N. O/1/1924, 10/1/1767; Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 208.

In short, good fortune aside, while cognizant of the great honor of being chosen over other nations to decorate the emperor's palace, the Compagnie's representatives in Canton were concerned that late delivery would put the merchants responsible in Canton at the mercy of the officials: delay in realizing the commission might bring about "la ruine" of the Compagnie's principal tradesmen (the Hong merchants at Canton) and as a direct consequence rebound on the Compagnie itself, thus jeopardizing French interests.

And delay there was.

Paris (1)

In the mid-eighteenth century the French upper classes, not unlike the British, were enamored with all things Chinese²⁶ and none more so than the French minister of State, Henri-Léonard-Jean-Baptiste Bertin (1720-92), a passionate sinophile and art collector whose varied portfolio included the Compagnie des Indes and whose extensive correspondence with the Jesuits in Peking is a rich source of information on all things Chinese of the period. One can but imagine his delight in autumn 1766 on hearing of the commission and his determination to be involved in the project.²⁷

The French version of the letter from Castiglione which accompanied the dispatch of the first four prints, along with a copy of the emperor's edict and the agreement between the Compagnie and the merchants in Canton, was addressed to the "très illustre Président de l'académie de peinture," indi-

²⁶ See for example Henri Cordier, *La Chine en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1910).

²⁷ Despite Bertin's frequent correspondence with the Jesuits in Peking, there is no indication that he had prior knowledge of the commission. News of the emperor's order did, however, find its way to Europe via non-official channels. See Hallerstein's letter in Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 268-271. Less surprisingly perhaps, Bertin was apparently ignorant of the Qing conquest against the Mongols and the Turkic Muslims. While the letter from the Directors of the Compagnie suggested that the prints depicted the emperor's victory against the Manchus, a Mémoire emanating from Bertin's office made the only slightly less unlikely suggestion that the designs depicted victories against rebels loyal to the former dynasty. A.N. O/1/1924, letter 17.12.66 and attached Mémoire. Bertin subsequently sought confirmation of the subject matter of the prints in a letter to Aloys (Louis) Kao (Gao Leisi 高類思 d.c. 1780) and Étienne Yang (Yang Dewang 楊德望 d.c. 1798), two young Chinese Jesuit priests whom he had taken under his wing while they were studying in France. They enlightened him. See Henri Cordier, "Les conquêtes de l'Empereur de la Chine," in *Mémoires Concernant l'Asie Orientale*, vol. I, ed. É. C. M. Senart, A. Barth, E. Chavannes, H. Cordier (Paris, 1913), 8, 10-11; Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 203, 246.

cating that in Peking, at least, responsibility for the project was expected to lie with the French court rather than the directors of the "Compagnie."²⁸ Bertin would not have countenanced anything less. The "Président de l'académie de peinture" was understood to equate to the Directeur Général des Bâtiments du Roi et Manufactures, the Marquis de Marigny.²⁹ The directors of the Compagnie thus wrote, or according to Bertin's account on his insistence wrote, promptly to Marigny, forwarding the designs and accompanying correspondence.³⁰ Bertin then alerted King Louis XV to the commission and at the end of December wrote to Marigny confirming His Majesty's wish that Marigny act in accordance with the instructions already forwarded to him by the Compagnie.³¹ Bertin had deftly established his own interest in the enterprise as minister responsible for the Compagnie des Indes.

Marigny would have had no doubt as to the artistic importance of a commission from the emperor of China. Indeed, even the Directors of the Compagnie recognized that the success of the work concerned "l'honneur des artistes français."³² In Bertin's hands, however, the project assumed an altogether greater significance. A Mémoire produced in his office for the King (and copied to Marigny) set out the political, commercial and religious importance of the project. It reported ("on dit que..."), erroneously as it transpired, that the commission had been procured for France *by the Jesuits in Peking* in the face of stiff competition from the British East India Company, while also asserting that in issuing the commission the Qianlong emperor "vient de Rendre hommage à l'Industrie française." It was this same Mémoire that suggested the emperor might also appreciate the designs reproduced on

²⁸ For discussion of the various renderings of the addressee, see Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 201-2 and Szrajber, "The Victories," 37. The agreement with the merchants indicates that there was both an Italian and Latin version of Castiglione's letter. It is unclear whether the French version was produced in Paris or China, as Cordier suggests. Cordier, *La Chine*, 58.

²⁹ The Marquis de Marigny, Abel-François Poisson de Vandières (1728-81), was the brother of Madame Pompadour.

³⁰ There is confusion as to whether the directors of the Compagnie initially assumed that it was their responsibility to have the commission executed or whether they immediately handed over responsibility for it to Marigny. According to Bertin's version of events, it was only as a result of his intervention that the designs were passed to Marigny, and thus treated as a royal commission. Bertin was to remind Marigny of this several years later when requesting copies of the prints. See Cordier, "Les conquêtes," 6-7; Cordier, *La Chine*, 57-8; Szrajber, "The Victories," 36-7.

³¹ A.N. O/1/1924, 27.12.1766.

³² A.N. O/1/1924, 17.12.1766.

Gobelins tapestry (Manufacture Royale des Gobelins) or at least Beauvais, and, perhaps inevitably, also on large Sèvres vases—an idea which King Louis apparently favored.³³

Bertin clearly regarded this as an opportunity to display French achievements, enabling the French to distinguish themselves from their European commercial competitors in the eyes of the Chinese emperor and thus assist French commerce, which it was believed was still suffering as a result of the British attempt to force the opening of the port of Ningbo in the mid 1750s.³⁴ In fact, even in these early stages Bertin may already have been aware that the emperor had merely instructed that the engravings be executed in Europe and that the decision to send them to France had been taken in Canton, on the intervention of the Jesuit Le Febvre.³⁵ However, not only was Bertin determined that this fortuitous commission should be exploited to the nation's maximum advantage, he also sought to commend the French Jesuits, with whom he had such a close relationship, by impressing upon the King that their presence in China worked in the interests of France, as well as God.³⁶ Bertin therefore had good reason to perpetuate, if not create, the myth that this was an imperial commission that had passed directly from the court of Qianlong to that of Louis XV.³⁷ Marigny charged Charles-Nicolas Cochin II (1715-1790), the artist and Secretary of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture with the execution of the

³³ A.N. O/1/1924, attached to letter of 17.12.1766.

³⁴ A.N. O/1/1924, 27.12.1766. See also A.N. O/1/1924, 31.12.1766; Cordier, "Les conquêtes," 7-8. For the Ningbo incident, see, Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident: La Commerce à Canton au XVIII^e siècle 1719-1833*, vol. II (Paris, 1964), 912.

³⁵ Bertin's later Mémoire, undated, but probably written after mid-April 1776 (see, Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 196, n. 3), indicates that at this point, at least, he was well aware, and willing to concede, that it had not been the emperor's decision that the commission should go to France, "La Compagnie des Indes n'a jamais été choisie pour faire executer les gravures; voici le fait." Cordier, *La Chine*, 57-58.

³⁶ Hallerstein noted that Castiglione had favored sending the designs to Italy. Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 270.

³⁷ For Bertin's role in the creation of the myth, see Torres, *Les Batailles de l'Empereur de Chine*, 38 and for evidence of the myth's persistence, see the contents page of the album of the conquest prints by Isadore-Stanislaus-Henri Helman (1785), discussed below. In fact, anyone who had seen the original Chinese copy of the agreement would have known of the truth. A note in French written (probably in Canton) on the Chinese "contract" states, "invitation faites aux ministres de France et de la Compagnie des Indes de la part des grandes Mandarins de la Province de Canton . . . de faire graver les quatre feuilles . . ." with no mention of the emperor. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (manuscripts orientaux), chinois no. 5231, microfilm 9199.

project.³⁸ Thus it was to Cochin that fell the day-to-day task of overseeing this immense artistic project, which in a mere two to three months had been saddled with so many weighty expectations.

Initially, at least, Cochin too seems to have been drawn into the fervor of expectation and excitement that now surrounded the project. In January 1767, he responded to a number of suggestions that had presumably emanated from Marigny himself, or perhaps, one may conjecture, Bertin. Instead of the print run of 200 copies originally agreed to by the merchants and the Compagnie, there was now discussion of producing 300 impressions on paper, of which 150 would be in red, plus an additional 100 on satin, although this latter notion Cochin ruled out because, according to his understanding, the designs were too fine and delicate to be printed on silk. He did however suggest that “papier de soie” from China would be a possibility. No opportunity for displaying French artistry and promoting France was to be lost. Thus, a “superb and rich” decorative border was envisaged that would “employ everything which characterizes the majesty of the King of France.” Cochin suggested architectural ornaments, which seemed to please Marigny—just as long as this included an abundance of fleur-de-lis.³⁹

The idea of reproducing the prints as Gobelins tapestry was also elaborated and it was now envisaged that this would be “in a grayish monochrome with the border a gold background and attributes in their natural

³⁸ Cochin and Marigny were both friends and colleagues. Cochin had accompanied Marigny on the Grand Tour from 1749-51 and in 1769 they travelled to Flanders and Holland together. Charles-Antoine Jombert, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre de Ch. Nic. Cochin fils* (Paris, 1770), 109.

³⁹ A.N. O/1/1073, 9.1.1767. For an English translation, see Szrajber, “The Victories,” 38-40. Cochin wisely cautioned that the Chinese might not understand emblems from Greek mythology or Christianity, and recommended instead architectural ornaments, animals and plants (e.g., the lion to denote courage, the eagle for loftiness, and the laurel for glory), although even these he acknowledged might need explanation. As the border had not been ordered by the emperor, Cochin suggested that it should be detachable; engraving it separately would also reduce the amount of work involved. In fact, the border did not come to fruition but, as Beurdeley notes the fleur-de-lis which Marigny wanted “employed abundantly” (A.N. O/1/1116, 19.4.1769) did make an appearance on the plates, on the quivers of Qing soldiers. Ironically, it is unlikely that in China the flower would have been associated with France. See Beurdeley who cites a letter from Father Amiot to Father de la Tour (October 17, 1759) in which he states that the “armes de France” were as pervasive in the palace of the emperor as in the Louvre or Versailles. Michel Beurdeley, *Peintres Jésuites en Chine au XVIII^e siècle* (Arcueil, 1997), 122.

color.” For Cochin, however, the priority was the engravings and he was quick to point out that the designs could not be released until the copper plates had been etched. Perhaps he was already beginning to sense the daunting scale of the project, or worse still, to wonder whether the Chinese would appreciate the true genius of French artistic talent. “One will observe,” wrote Cochin “that the Chinese prefer small, cold and precise hatchings above everything characterizing genius and talent.”⁴⁰

But in the weeks that followed, concern about differing aesthetic values featured relatively low on the list of Cochin’s worries. He had, he admitted to Marigny, underestimated both the cost and the time that would be required.⁴¹ On receiving the first four designs, Cochin’s first concern was to appoint the engravers. The designs were highly detailed and if they were to be executed to conform with the imperial request and be of a suitably high standard, there were only half a dozen engravers in Paris at this time who would be able to carry out the work: those appointed to execute the first four designs were Jean-Philippe Le Bas, said to be the most skilled, Augustin de Saint-Aubin, Benoît Louis Prévost, and Jacques Aliamet.⁴² It was soon apparent that the quality of work demanded was out of the ordinary, even for these most skilled of artists. Cochin’s original estimates, he now confessed, were twenty years out of date⁴³ and not only did the engravers wish to be paid 10,000 L with an extra 1,000 L if they were charged with a particularly detailed and complex design, but they insisted that the time allowed for execution would have to be extended because of the extra care required.⁴⁴ In fact, as far as cost was concerned, the French had been given *carte blanche* (although in practice securing the monies from the Treasury was to give Cochin more than a little grief): the agreement had simply stated that any expenses beyond the 5,000 taels advance would be met on completion of the project. Marigny did not therefore question the engravers’ fees, or those of Cochin himself, but on the matter of timing, he was not prepared to be so flexible.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ A.N. O/1/1073, 9.1.1767. As a reflection of the increasing nervousness surrounding the project, three months later Marigny, in turn, reminded Cochin that the Chinese prefer precision and finish to the “genius and talent” prized by the French. A.N. O/1/1073, 7.4.1769, O/1/1024, 19.4.1769; Szrajber, “The *Victories*,” 40.

⁴¹ A.N. O/1/1073, 16.2.1767.

⁴² A.N. O/1/1073, 9.1.1767.

⁴³ A.N. O/1/1073, 16.2.1767.

⁴⁴ A.N. O/1/1073, 9.1.1767; Szrajber, “The *Victories*,” 38.

⁴⁵ A.N. O/1/1116, 19.4.1767.

The Qianlong emperor had ordered maximum haste and the merchants' agreement with the Compagnie had stipulated that the first four copper plates together with 200 prints and the original designs should be returned to China in the autumn of 1768.⁴⁶ When the engravers, therefore, requested a delay until the end of summer 1769, Marigny insisted that they must commit to the end of 1768 because "a year's delay could remove France's advantage, which would be regrettable."⁴⁷ The following month, in May 1767, Marigny wrote again to remind Cochin of the importance to the French nation that the work be executed as quickly as possible.⁴⁸ Clearly, there was much at stake and he was feeling the pressure.

But there were other headaches for Cochin. The designs were unusually large for an engraving and in May 1767, the copper plates that had been ordered from England had yet to arrive.⁴⁹ Even the paper was of such large proportions that it had to be especially made by the paper-merchant, Antoine Mathieu Prudhomme.⁵⁰ More importantly, in terms of the pressure on time, one of the four designs, that by the Italian Augustinian Giovanni Damasceno, was swiftly identified as inferior and in need of refinement "to give it some spirit and lightness to inspire the engraver."⁵¹ The intention had been that Cochin's main artistic input would be retouching all the etched proofs, but now he also had to make improvements to the design by Damasceno and, as it subsequently transpired, also to another, probably that by Ignatius Sichelbarth.⁵² Inevitably, this would cause further delays. Beset by problems, Cochin asked to be relieved of all other duties.⁵³

⁴⁶ Zhuang Jifa, *Qing Gaozong*, 520. For a French translation, see Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 184.

⁴⁷ A.N. O/1/1116, 19.4.1767; Szrajber, "The Victories," 40.

⁴⁸ Szrajber, "The Victories," 41; A.N. O/1/1116, 26.5.1767.

⁴⁹ A.N. O/1/1116, 24.5.1767. Hallerstein concurred with this view. See his letter, Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 270.

⁵⁰ The paper known as Grand Louvois was usually used for maps. For the prints, it had to be especially made without a fold in the middle. Jombert, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre*, 120; Cordier, "Les conquêtes," 9-10.

⁵¹ A.N. O/1/1073, 9.1.1767.

⁵² *Ibid.*, and A.N. O/1/1073, 16.2.1767; A.N. O/1/1924, Cochin to Marigny n.d. (probably late 1767), respectively. According to Jombert, Cochin entirely reworked five of the total sixteen designs. Jombert, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre*, 120.

⁵³ A.N. O/1/1073, 2.4.1767. Jombert notes that work on the prints kept Cochin occupied almost continually for several years, the catalogue however suggests that he did produce several other works during the period 1767-70. Jombert, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre*, 108-14.

By September 1767, Marigny had to accept defeat: none of the prints would be ready in time for the winter sailing. The twelve remaining designs had now all arrived in Paris and Cochin proposed a new schedule: the first four would be ready by winter 1768, the next six or possibly eight by the end of 1769 and the remainder by 1770.⁵⁴ To cope with the entire series, Cochin took on three more engravers: Pierre-Philippe Choffard, François-Denis Née, and Louis-Joseph Masquelier I. Subsequently a fourth, Nicholas De Launay, was recruited, but there was no question of finding another eight sufficiently skilled men, so some would have to engrave two or more plates. As winter approached another problem loomed: the shorter days would reduce the working day to five hours and if the weather were overcast work might even have to be abandoned altogether (Fig. 2).⁵⁵

An unexplained reference to “accidents” suggests that by the end of 1767 Cochin may also have already encountered problems with the printing.⁵⁶ He had selected Charles Beauvais for the job, on the grounds that one could have complete confidence in both his “talent and his probity,”⁵⁷ but Cochin had clearly underestimated the difficulty of pulling such large prints in great numbers. It was unusual, indeed probably unprecedented, to pull so many prints from such delicate engravings. Moreover, the size of the plates made the printing particularly difficult; Cochin now feared that only twelve to fifteen impressions could be printed per day.⁵⁸

Once the delay was accepted as inevitable by all parties, the French endeavored to limit the diplomatic damage by all possible means. In late 1768-69, Cochin produced a *Mémoire* detailing all the problems that might hamper successful printing in China, suggesting that at the very least paper and ink should be sent to China, and rashly offering to pull 1,000 copies of each print in France.

⁵⁴ Pelliot, “Les conquêtes,” 208.

⁵⁵ A.N. O/1/1924, 19.9.1767.

⁵⁶ A.N. O/1/1924, Cochin to Marigny n.d. (probably late 1767).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ A.N. O/1/1924, Cochin to Marigny n.d. (probably late 1767). As Griffiths has pointed out, to a great extent the quality of a print depended on the skill of the printer who was the “unsung hero” of the process. Antony Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking: an introduction to the history and techniques* (London, 1980), 34. This is reflected not only in the lack of acclaim or attribution afforded to printers compared with engravers, but also in their comparative earnings. See Cochin’s summary accounts in A.N. O/1/1924.

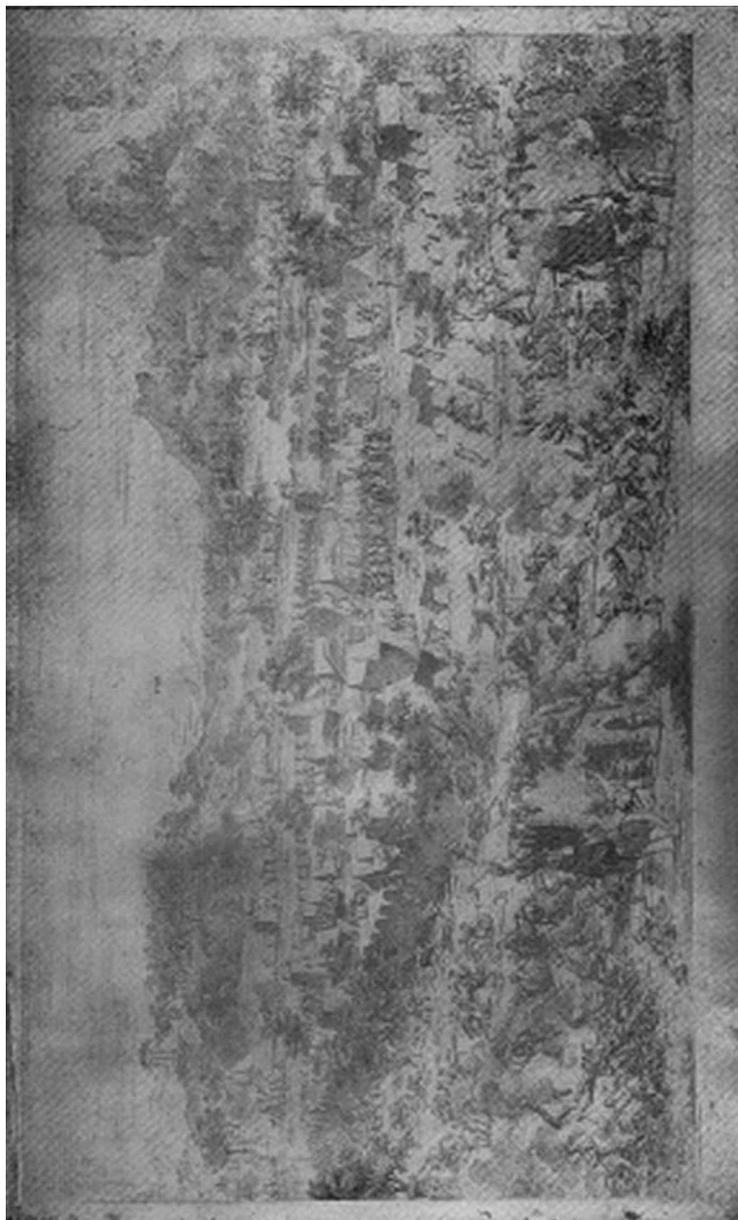


Fig. 2. Copper plate for print of the Battle of Tonguzluq (1756). Augustin de Saint-Aubin (1773) after Giuseppe Castiglione. Courtesy of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin.

The engraving for the plates is fine and the printing is very difficult. If they are taken to China where they are not familiar with the process, I am afraid that not only will the printing be smudged but the copper plates will be damaged and it will be difficult to fulfill the emperor's instructions. Let me explain every point in detail. Firstly, Chinese paper is prone to have hairs and it will not be easy to get a clean print, moreover once it has been soaked whenever one presses it onto the plate and then removes it one cannot avoid tearing it and even if one uses foreign paper, one has to get the method of soaking right, if it is too wet the surplus will smudge, if it is too dry the print will not be true. As for blending the color of the ink, it is particularly difficult to prepare. If it is not done correctly, it is extremely difficult to get it to sink in, and the fine lines of the copper plates will inevitably smudge. The coloring we use is not black ink. We use a kind of sediment of grape wine and refine it until it is just right for use. If another kind of black is used then the print will not be true, and one might easily damage the copper plates. Furthermore, when one is wiping off the ink, even if one uses a soft, fine cloth, everything depends on how delicately one wipes with the palm of the hand, one has to get the pressure uniform, the "yin and yang" [light and shade?] in harmony and only then will it be as it should be. With this art form, it is not only novices who can be caught out. Even among several hundreds of craftsmen in the West with many years of experience only four or five have this skill. It is even truer for these finely engraved plates that if you find a skilled craftsman, then you may be able to take more than one thousand prints from each plate and still repair the plate, but in the case of a novice, it will be difficult to print successfully and easy to damage the plates. If one flattens the fine lines or scratches the plates in the process of wiping them, the plates will be ruined. For all sorts of reasons I don't presume to be pompous, and not least because this is an imperial commission, I would truly wish for fewer worries and less chance to commit an error, but it would be best to have one thousand prints made of each in the West and send back all the plates with detailed instructions on how to make them and take care of them.⁵⁹

Cochin had little confidence that the totally inexperienced artisans in China would be able to pull the prints successfully but by offering to augment the original order, he may also have been endeavoring to buy time. Confronted with the practicalities of artistic endeavor, Bertin's dream began to recede, and with it all notions of a Franco-Chinese special relationship.

⁵⁹ It had earlier been suggested in an exchange between Marigny and Cochin that they might produce a manual and send a press with the necessary tools (A.N. O/1/1073, 9.1.1767), but this was the first time that sending ink and paper had been discussed. The original French document is apparently lost but a Chinese translation is quoted in a memorial to the court from the Viceroy Li Shiyao in Canton. See Zhuang Jifa, *Qing Gaozong*, 524-5, Taipei: National Palace Archives, *yuezhebao*, Box 2771, 80 *bao*, No.3155. This is presumably the Chinese translation by Benoist that was returned to Canton with the instruction that it be forward to the emperor in a memorial from the Viceroy and the Hoppo. See below. *Lettres Édifiantes*, vol. 24 (1781), 385.

Canton (2)

In September 1768, the Grand Councillors Fu Heng 傅恒 and Yin Jishan 尹繼善 instructed Li Shiyao 李侍儁 (d. 1788), the Viceroy in Canton, to find out why the prints, plates, and sketches of the first four designs had not yet arrived in Peking; it was after all already two years since the designs had been dispatched.⁶⁰ In reply, the following month Li Shiyao and De Kui 德魁 (Hoppon 1766-74, 1775-78)⁶¹ explained that the French were having difficulty in finding an adequate number of skilled engravers and had given assurances that the first four designs would be completed by the following year. Li and De also confirmed, presumably on the basis of a second “agreement,” that the remaining twelve designs dispatched in 1766 (QL31) would be completed, four per year, in 1770, 1771, and 1772 (QL35, 36, and 37).⁶² In short, the first dispatch would be overdue but the last three dispatches would come in ahead of the agreed schedule.

The first shipment did not in fact arrive in Canton until October 1770, and only carried 232 prints, two of the original designs, and no copper plates. In the meantime, officials in Canton had received a letter from the Compagnie regretting that only 232 prints had been of sufficiently high standard and that work on the fourth design had been delayed because it needed retouching. They had also received a copy of Cochin’s *Mémoire*, enumerating his concerns about the ability of Chinese printers to pull further prints, the offer to supply the Chinese with ink and paper and even to produce a larger number of prints in Paris (Fig. 3).⁶³

By the end of 1771, a total of 1,047 prints and six of the original designs had been received in Canton. Promises were made that the remainder would follow the next year, but Li confided to the court that, in his opinion, the French were not making sufficient effort and he had written asking them to uphold the original agreement and to hurry up.⁶⁴ By the autumn of 1772, still only 1,507 prints, eight original designs, and seven

⁶⁰ *Qianlong Xiyu zhantu midang huicui* 乾隆西域戰圖秘檔薈萃 (hereafter QXZMH) [A collection of documents relating to the prints of Qianlong’s campaign in the Western Regions], Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’an guan comp. (Beijing, 2007), 153 (6.9.1768).

⁶¹ De Kui left office in 1774 having served as Hoppon for eight years but his successor was impeached and De Kui was reappointed in 1775. Shortly afterwards, he fell ill and died in 1778. Cheong, *Hong Merchants*, 244.

⁶² QXZMH, 154 (5.10.1768).

⁶³ QXZMH, 155 (23.10.1770); *Lettres Édifiantes*, vol. 24 (1781), 385.

⁶⁴ QXZMH, 157 (24.11.1771).



Fig. 3. Copperplate print of the Battle of Arcul (1759). Jacques Aliamet after Jean Denis Attiret (1765). Courtesy of the British Museum.

plates had arrived and Li was having to placate the court, once again, and provide assurances that he was pursuing the matter with urgency.⁶⁵ In reality there was little he could do to speed up the deliveries, which continued to arrive in seven more shipments (bringing the total to ten) over the next five years. Nevertheless, some idea of the pressure that Li and De were under is reflected in an account by the French traveler and trader, Charles de Constant (1762-1835), in which he laments the lack of cooperation that the foreign merchants *normally* receive from the Canton officials. According to de Constant, when in 1776 the French ship *Le Beaumont*, carrying one of the final dispatches of the prints, arrived in Canton despite the fact that it was taking on a lot of water, Chinese officials refused a request for six light vessels to unload her, offering only the normal one or two at a time and at uncertain intervals. The French made further representations but all to no avail until they asserted, not without a certain degree of French guile, that the prints for which the Chinese authorities were repeatedly pressing them had been stashed when the ship was empty in Europe and were therefore underneath the cargo of cotton taken on board in India. Li and his colleagues could not risk being responsible for a further delay—still less for sodden prints—and additional light vessels promptly became available.⁶⁶

And there were other delays that also must have frustrated anxious officials in Canton that could not be blamed on the French. Scholars who have hitherto estimated that the final batches should have arrived in mid 1775 assume the normal length of sailing time from France. In fact, winds and bad weather appear to have considerably delayed the arrival of the final two ships until 1776 and 1777 respectively.⁶⁷

Paris (2)

While there is no doubt that the majority of the obstacles to the production of the prints in Paris resulted from a combination of technical difficulties and the painstaking artistic skill that was involved in their production, there was another aggravation that did little to speed the work and risked jeopardizing it completely. The contracts drawn up with the engravers

⁶⁵ QXZMH, 158 (27.7.1772).

⁶⁶ Louis Dermigny, *Les Mémoires de Charles de Constant sur la commerce à la Chine* (Paris, 1964), 387.

⁶⁷ QXZMH, 165 (8.12.1775), 166 (12.11.1776) and 167 (20.10.1777).

stipulated that they would be paid in installments and for their part they committed to do everything possible to complete the work by the agreed date.⁶⁸ By 1770, however, Cochin was writing frequently to M. Denis, Treasurer of the Bâtiments du Roi, requesting funds. The problem seems to have been that the anticipated monies were not being deposited with the treasury by the Compagnie and Cochin was repeatedly having to make excuses and promises to the engravers on account of delayed payments. Although Cochin was careful to point out that the situation had not *yet* prejudiced progress on the plates, he leaves no doubt that the delay, in some cases of more than six months, risked causing a complete suspension of the project.⁶⁹ And Cochin had good reason to be worried. The previous year, all the Compagnie's monopoly trading rights had been suspended and by spring 1770 it was being rumored in Paris that the company faced liquidation. In early April, as Cochin anxiously sought assurances that alternative funding would be found,⁷⁰ an edict was issued declaring that all the Compagnie's assets and properties had passed to the state and that the King now assumed the obligation for its debts and annuities. The liquidation was to drag on for well over a decade and periodically Cochin still had to chase payments, but at least he had the assurance that the costs were now underwritten.

By 1774, when the final prints were being pulled, it must have been obvious to French traders and politicians alike that they had won little credit for their pains in the eyes of the Qing court.⁷¹ The copper plates had been engraved to the highest standard and two hundred prints of each design had been produced.⁷² Reportedly, the emperor was pleased with his prints and in Canton the French traders had derived some benefit from the

⁶⁸ See the signed contracts with various dates in A.N. O/1/1924 and O/1/1911.

⁶⁹ A.N. O/1/1924, 6.2.1770.

⁷⁰ A.N. O/1/1912, 8.4.1770.

⁷¹ Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 209.

⁷² In fact, the French produced rather more than the required 200 prints of some designs. None had a border but at least one print was placed under glass with an ebony and filigree frame, possibly akin to those produced for Louis XV. QXZMH, 167 (20.10.1777) and 163 (11.1771-11.1773); Nie Chongzheng, "Qianlong pingding Zhunbu Huibu zhantu he Qingdai di tongban hua," 64; Fre. J. Van den Brandt, "Un manuscrit inédit des 'Conquêtes de K'ien-long'," *Monumenta Serica* (1939-40), 90. This article (pp. 85-115) reproduces in full the anonymous document, *Précis historique de la guerre dont les principaux événements sont représentés dans les 16 estampes gravées à Paris pour l'empereur de la Chine sur les dessins que ce Prince a fait faire à Pékin* (Paris, 1791).

eagerness of the Viceroy to take prompt receipt of the prints.⁷³ However, there was no longer talk of reproduction of the designs on Gobelins tapestry or Sèvres ceramics. Nor was there any sign of a follow up commission, a burgeoning of trade, or a budding special French relationship with the Qing court.

The timing had been bad. The ten years that it had taken to fulfill the commission had witnessed a marked decline in French influence in China. Not only had the dissolution of the Jesuits left the French mission in Peking divided and weakened,⁷⁴ but the folding of the *Compagnie des Indes* and the passing of responsibility for French trading interests to a French country trader, whose position as honorary Consul was not recognized by the Chinese,⁷⁵ dealt a blow to the French presence in Canton rendering its merchants unable to capitalize on any goodwill that might have been forthcoming on completion of the commission. Yet, even if the circumstances had been different and the French had managed to produce the prints more rapidly, it is unlikely that the outcome for French trade would have been substantially different.

Canton (3)

As for the fears of the *Compagnie's* representatives in Canton, we can only surmise as to the full implications of the delay for the Chinese merchants. After the suspension of the *Compagnie's* exclusive trading privileges in 1769 and its dissolution in April 1770, correspondence with its new financial administrators continued during the long process of liquidation.⁷⁶ Most of the *Compagnie's* internal records, however, were destroyed in the French Revolution (1789-1799),⁷⁷ leaving no clues as to the pressure that the Chinese officials might have passed on to the merchants, or merchants to the *Compagnie*, in their efforts to have the commission completed and

⁷³ *Lettres Édifiantes*, vol. 24 (1781), 347; Fre. J. Van den Brandt, "Un manuscrit inédit," 89-90. See also Torres, *Les Batailles de l'Empereur de Chine*, 82.

⁷⁴ For a long and detailed account of these painful years for the mission, see Camille de Rochemonteix, *Joseph Amiot et les derniers survivants de la mission Française à Pékin (1750-1795)* (Paris, 1914).

⁷⁵ Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton*, 109.

⁷⁶ A.N. O/1/1912, 8.4.1770; Henri Cordier, "Le Consulat de France à Canton au XVIII^e siècle," *T'oung Pao* 9, 1908, 47. Bertin's successor the new Controller of Finances, Joseph Marie Terray, took over responsibility for the finances of the *Compagnie*.

⁷⁷ Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 201.

so avoid personal responsibility and possibly punishment by the court. We can, nonetheless, glean a little of how officials and merchants in Canton might have viewed this unprecedented venture, from circumstantial evidence.

In 1765, Augustin de Hallerstein (劉松齡 1702-74) a member of the Portuguese mission and President of the Tribunal of Mathematics, wrote to his brother informing him of the imperial commission and stating that “whatever the price, the Viceroy of Canton is to pay in full.”⁷⁸ He was wrong—indeed one might say naive. The original agreement concerning the first four prints indicates that the merchants deposited 5,000 taels with the Compagnie as a down payment and gave assurances that any outstanding costs would be settled on fulfillment of the commission. Pelliot has calculated that the final French bill would have amounted to some 20,000 taels (c. £5,500 /or 204,000L). The majority of this was paid by the Cohong to the Compagnie by the end of 1766,⁷⁹ and while small outstanding amounts were still being chased in the late 1770s, there is nothing in the extant French records to suggest that the emperor’s bill was not settled in toto, as agreed.

According to the inventory of the *Neiwufu* (內務府 the Imperial Household Department), on issuing the order for the commission to Canton, the court had sent 1,000 taels for each batch of three designs, i.e. a total of 4,000 taels for the entire project. The court subsequently learned (from where it is unclear) that according to an agreement between the Cohong merchants and the Compagnie each copper plate had been appraised at 200 taels, making a total of 3,200s taels for the sixteen plates, and that each print was priced at 0.5 taels, which amounted to 1,600 taels for 32,000 prints (200 of each), bringing the grand total to 4, 800 taels.⁸⁰ On receipt of the completed order in October 1777, the *Neiwufu* recorded that it would now send the additional 800 taels.⁸¹

⁷⁸ “[P]recium quantumcunque persolvat Prorex Cantonensis,” Pelliot, “Les conquêtes,” 270. Cochin also spoke of “the considerable funds that the emperor has allocated to the commission.” A.N. O/1/1073, 16.2.1767.

⁷⁹ Pelliot, “Les conquêtes,” 211.

⁸⁰ QXZMH, 159 (14.4.1773) and 162-4, (11.1771-11.1773).

⁸¹ QXZMH, 167 (2.10.1777). The sources give no indication of who took receipt of the payment, but it would undoubtedly have been paid into the official purse and not to the Hong merchants or the French. Recent views on the cost of the commission have varied from “very expensive” (*feichang angui di* 非常昂贵的), Weng Lianxi, *Qingdai gongting banhua*, 20 (in fact Weng mistakenly gives the figure of 20,400 L) and “a considerable

Clearly, all communications with the court concerning the financing of the project were undertaken without recourse to Paris and the true costs. So, who was expected to bear the financial brunt? At no point in their frequent correspondence with the court did Li Shiyao and De Kui mention payment. The undertaking of the Cohong merchants to pay any additional costs must therefore be taken as exactly that. Moreover, while there is no evidence that the 4,000 (ultimately 4,800) taels paid by the court to Canton was not passed on to the Cohong, it is highly unlikely. Officials did not pay merchants. Indeed, there is no indication that the merchants or indeed the Compagnie had any knowledge of the two payments made by the court. There was, however, a well established pattern of practice involving Canton officials, the Chinese merchants, Western traders and the court which would have comfortably accommodated the commission.

Li Shiyao's tenure in Canton was renowned for three reasons: the length of its duration, a total of some fourteen years; his attempts to regulate foreign trade;⁸² and the vast amount of presents in the shape of curios or "sing-songs," as they were known, that he presented to the emperor and those at court.⁸³ As Viceroy in Canton, he was of course well positioned to acquire these sing-songs which in the mid-eighteenth century became a source of some contention among Westerners, merchants and officials in Canton.⁸⁴

The presentation of gifts from afar to the court had started as precisely that, but in the course of the eighteenth century, it developed into an obligatory form of tribute from the provinces. In the Kangxi era, 50,000 taels were set aside annually from the Canton maritime customs for the exclusive purchase of sing-songs. After 1726, the allocation was reduced to 30,000 taels, which the Hoppo raised—and more—by a direct 10% charge on foreign trade (this was later known as "the Hoppo's 10 %"). Soon,

sum," Reed and Demattè, *China on Paper*, 97, to the claim that even at 20,000 taels, it "was not at all expensive" (*bingbu suan angui* 并不算昂贵). Zhuang Jifa, *Qing Gaozong*, 527. The truth of the matter was that the cost to the court was a fraction of the real cost.

⁸² Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 482.

⁸³ It is claimed that Li's behavior in this respect was so excessive that it encouraged extravagance among other provincial officials in competing for imperial favor. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 482. For Qianlong's somewhat half-hearted objections to the practice in the 1780s, see Cheong, *The Hong Merchants*, 226-227.

⁸⁴ The term sing-song covered a wide range of objets d'arts including jewelry, clocks, and all kinds of mechanical instruments, but automata, often embellished with gold and silver and inlaid with gems, featured strongly.

however, merchants were questioning whether this was a traditional “presentation tax” or an illegal tax for which the Hoppo should be impeached. Western traders, to whom the Hong merchants inevitably endeavored to pass on this burden, joined their voices to the protests, and in 1736 on the accession of the Qianlong emperor the 10% tax was repealed.⁸⁵

Officials in Canton once again found themselves dependent on an allocation of a mere 30,000 taels to fulfill their tribute commitment and equally important, to purchase private presents necessary to curry favor at court. When the Hoppo boarded a ship to check the cargo and carry out the necessary formalities, he would instruct the “security merchant” to purchase any sing-songs that took his fancy and these the merchants would then be expected to offer to the Hoppo at considerable discount.⁸⁶ Thus, with less money to spend on sing-songs, the Hoppo simply forced the merchants to sell at an even greater loss, or risk losing their license.⁸⁷ For the Hong merchants the practice, which placed an unfair burden on those who secured ships with cargoes including large quantities of sing-songs, was intolerable. By the 1750s, they were refusing to secure ships with sing-songs and insisted that they be secured by more than one merchant.⁸⁸ It is reasonable to assume therefore that the burden of tribute for the emperor and private presents for sponsors at court was an important factor in bringing about the formation of the Cohong in 1760. Even with the formation of the Cohong, the merchants, few of whom were free from debt in the late 1750s to 1760s, continued to lobby the foreign traders to prohibit the import of these items. But as far as the British East India Company was concerned, at least, sing-songs were useful for redressing the balance of payments and for the Viceroy and his officials they were vital to their standing at court.⁸⁹ Only towards the end of the 1760s, when the market

⁸⁵ Cheong, *The Hong Merchants*, 225.

⁸⁶ In order to trade, every foreign vessel that arrived in Canton had to be “secured,” which necessitated the Hoppo assigning a “security merchant” to each ship. The merchant then had a monopoly on the ship’s trade but also had to serve as its guarantor. The duties of the security merchant included ensuring that all the port formalities were carried out, underwriting all import and export duties, and taking responsibility for the conduct of the ship’s crew. Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton*, 92.

⁸⁷ For discussion of the financial problems of the Hong merchants and the financial burden imposed by the sing-songs, see Kuo-tong Ch’en, *The Insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants, 1760-1843* (Taipei, 1990), 95-97, 252-27.

⁸⁸ In 1754, merchants boycotted six English ships until the Hoppo forcibly allocated them to specific merchants. When they protested, it was agreed that liability for the sing-songs should be shouldered collectively. Cheong, *The Hong Merchants*, 225.

⁸⁹ It has even been suggested that the privilege of the Hoppo’s office depended on the

became glutted and the price fell dramatically did sing-songs begin to lose their currency.⁹⁰ In 1772, the *St James Chronicle* reported that a shipment of English sing-songs had been refused entry to Canton and forced to return to London, owing apparently, to the earlier arrival “of a Ship with a very large Collection, that was originally designed for the Spring Gardens Museum, which struck the Chinese with so much astonishment, that the Whole was purchased for the emperor, and no other was admired, or would sell.”⁹¹

To the French mind, the prints were obviously of a different order to tribute gifts, not least because they had been commissioned by the emperor. But as far as Qing administrative structures were concerned, there was no alternative but to treat them as tribute: not of course from the emperor of France but from the officials of Canton. As usual, the court had made a token payment for “the gift” (normally made by allocating a portion of tax revenue), but it was the merchants who picked up the full bill—a necessary price that as with the purchase of the sing-songs, had to be borne in order to retain their trading privileges. Not only is there no evidence that Li requested any additional payments from the court, but the prints were sent to Peking along with other provincial tribute.⁹² This had the advantage of saving on transportation charges that could not easily be passed on to the merchants, but more significantly, it was the only available channel for presenting these artifacts to the emperor.⁹³

It is tempting to wonder whether, as the market and indeed the court became flooded with luxury curios, it had occurred to Chinese officials (and merchants alike) that imperially commissioned Western works of art might come to replace the procurement of sing-songs as a form of tribute.

incumbent securing these gifts. Paul Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845* (Hong Kong, 2005), 25.

⁹⁰ For an account of how the decline in the market affected James Cox, a leading British supplier of sing-songs, see R. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA., 1978), 6. Pagani dates the flooding of the market slightly later, in the late 1780s-90s. Catherine Pagani, *Eastern Maginificance and European Ingenuity* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1993), 94.

⁹¹ Clare Le Corbeiller, “James Cox: a biographical note” (quoting *St James Chronicle*, 27-29th August, 1772), *Burlington Magazine* 102, no. 80 (June 1970), 352. Spring Gardens Museum (at Charing Cross) was where Cox displayed his works from 1772-74. Altick, *The Shows*, 63.

⁹² Zhuang Jifa, *Qing Gazong*, 526.

⁹³ See the deliberations surrounding how to present the emperor with the tapestries made in France for decoration of the European pavilions at Yuanming yuan. Cordier, “Les Correspondants de Bertin,” 303ff.

If so, they would certainly have lamented that this would be likely to cause them considerably more bother, not to mention increase their dependency on the vagaries of Westerners. They need not have worried. The ten merchants whose names were listed at the bottom of the initial agreement with the Compagnie were those who formed the 1760 Cohong.⁹⁴ In the context of the squeeze that they were already suffering in respect of the price of sing-songs, the commission was, originally at least, a minor commitment. For the head of the Cohong, Pan Zhencheng 潘振承 (Punkhequa I),⁹⁵ to whom Li Shiyao regularly addressed his complaints about the delay, 20,000 taels would not have been a considerable sum. But in the early 1760s, the Cohong was still working effectively which meant that Pan and the more affluent of the Hong members were now in effect shouldering the debts of all their colleagues. After 1765, as the Cohong began to function less effectively, several of the less wealthy houses ceased to trade and by 1771, Pan was working with the British (who with other foreigners had sought actively to break the monopoly of the Cohong) to engineer the Cohong's dissolution. This was finally effected at the price of a bribe of 100,000 taels paid by the East India Company, via Pan, to Viceroy Li Shiyao.⁹⁶

Had imperial commissions for Western objets d'arts become a regular practice (perhaps even taking the place of sing-songs), while the Cohong existed the main financial burden of any further commission would undoubtedly have been shouldered by Pan and the wealthier merchants. With the Cohong's dissolution, a fund was established (the *consoo* fund) into which all merchants were required to contribute ensuring that, in theory, the burden of paying for gifts fell equitably on the wealthy and less

⁹⁴ Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 3.834. The merchants listed were: Pan Tongwen 潘同文, Yan Taihe 彦泰和, Chen Guangshun 陳廣順, Qiu Yifeng 邱義豐, Cai Qufeng 蔡聚豐, Chen Yuanchen 陳源泉, Cai Fengyuan 蔡逢源, Zhang Xiyuan 張禧源, Chen Yuanlai 陳遠來, Ye Guangyuan 葉廣源. See Cordier, "Les Marchandes Hanistes de Canton," 306.

⁹⁵ Pan's company, founded in c. 1750, was known as Tongwen and his name appears as Pan Tongwen on the document with the other Cohong merchants. Pan was not only one of the wealthiest merchants but one of the most politically astute and influential. For biographies of Pan and his descendents see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 605-606; Liang Jiabin, *Guangdong shisan hangkiao* (Shanghai, 1937), 259-263; and Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 1.339-341 and 2.836. The French were wary of Pan and accused him of favoring British interests, one French official noting that "[il] cache sous des dehors séduisants l'âme la plus scélérate qui ait jamais habité un corps humaine." Dermigny, *Les Mémoires de Constant*, 411.

⁹⁶ Cheong, *The Hong Merchants*, 126, n. 109. See also Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 2.836.

wealthy alike.⁹⁷ Undoubtedly, the commission did not cause the collapse of the Cohong but it was symptomatic of the problem. In the eyes of the Canton merchants and officials alike, the prints functioned in much the same way as the Western curios—a burden for the merchants and an obligation for officials.

Peking (2)

By November 1770, Cochin's *Mémoire* with a covering letter from the Compagnie's directors in Canton recounting the difficulties of the printing process had been received by Benoist in Peking. Benoist endeavored to relay the content to the officials at court (Fu Heng and Yin Jishan), but he was told firmly that the emperor had entrusted this commission to the Viceroy in Canton and it was to him that the French should address any problems.⁹⁸ Not surprisingly, when the suggestion to supply ink and paper and/or a greater quantity of prints did finally reach the emperor via Li Shiyao, the emperor's response was curt, tinged perhaps with indignation: "they should print 200 of each and send them back together with the plates. As for the paper and printing ink, there is no need to bring these."⁹⁹ The Qianlong emperor was not looking for a long-term relationship with the West, commercial or otherwise. With a set of plates and prints in hand, he was confident that the empire would be able to produce its own copperplate prints and dispense with reliance on the dilatory Europeans.

By December 1772, seven plates had finally arrived in Peking and Benoist was summoned to the palace to be consulted about the printing process. The first printing from the copper plates on Chinese soil took place in spring 1773 and the prints were presented to the emperor in June. We know little about the printing process except that initially eight of every ten prints were not good.¹⁰⁰ According to Benoist, however, of those

⁹⁷ In practice, by the late 1770s the fund was regularly drained by the Hoppo, and officials were again looking for "contributions." Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*, 100, 172-173.

⁹⁸ Letter from Benoist to Bertin, 25.11.1770 in Cordier, "Les Correspondants de Bertin," 338-340.

⁹⁹ *Qing shilu* 清實錄, *juan* 871:31b-32b. QL35.10 *gengzi*.

¹⁰⁰ QXZMH, 164 (Nov. 1773); Pfister, *Notices biographiques*, 818. As far as paper was concerned, Weng notes that some of the paper appears to have been made in Hangzhou and some imported, and the ink was made from pine ash (*songyan mo* 松煙墨). Weng Lianxi, *Qingdai gongting banhua*, 28.

he saw, although not as good as the prints pulled in France, they were better than expected. Benoist died on October 23, 1774, before the arrival of the last batch of plates, but he had written a report pooling his own experience and the advice of Cochin to serve as a guide for subsequent printings.¹⁰¹ It is not known who, if anyone, among the Jesuits assumed Benoist's place in supervising the copperplate printing, but one possible candidate who may have lent his expertise, at least unofficially, would have been Louis Kao.¹⁰²

Conclusion

France

The feverish excitement that the commission initially generated in Paris had less to do with artistic endeavor than the unexpected and unprecedented nature of an imperial commission from the emperor of China to be executed on the order of Louis XV. The potential political and commercial benefits fitted well with the intellectual mood of those such as Voltaire (1694-1778) and other thinkers who during the Age of European Enlightenment looked to China for inspiration. The Qing emperors not only shared many of the same concerns and objectives of their peers in Europe, in Confucianism they also had a moral philosophy that was seemingly and alluringly religion-free.¹⁰³ It was not, therefore, without reason that François Quesnay (1694-1775) and the French Physiocrats looked to the Chinese imperial system to support their calls for enlightened despotism.

While the political and economic hopes of the French elite were ultimately shattered, there can be no doubt of the intrinsic value of the prints

¹⁰¹ Pfister, *Notices biographiques*, 823; *Lettres Édifiantes*, vol. 24 (1781), 386-387. See note 59 above.

¹⁰² Both Kao and Étienne Yang, the two Jesuit priests who spent over ten years in France, had been instructed in the art of engraving and printing before their return to Peking in 1766. Among the many gifts they were given to take back with them for the emperor was a portable printing press. After their return, Yang went to Jiangxi and then to Canton to serve as Procurer of the French Mission, while Kao appears to have worked in and around Peking. Beurdeley, *Peintres Jésuites en Chine au XVIII e siècle*, 145; Rochemonteix, *Joseph Amiot*, 103-107 (where Kao's name is rendered as Pierre Ko). See also note 27 above.

¹⁰³ See Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge MA., 2005), 422 and Hostetler, for example, who discusses the parallels between early modern mapping activity in France, Russia, and China. Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago, 2001), 74.

finally produced; the commission took French engraving to new heights, skills were stretched to unprecedented limits and valuable lessons learned about the printing process.¹⁰⁴ Not surprisingly, this potent combination of artistic merit and political significance did not escape the notice of art connoisseurs and collectors in their desire to acquire the prints. The Qianlong emperor assumed, more or less correctly, that since China was so far away the Europeans would not be much interested in the subject matter of his prints.¹⁰⁵ It was not his primary intention to impress the Europeans with images of his victories and there is no evidence that he was at all concerned whether or not the prints circulated in France, despite the much repeated suggestion in French official circles that this was to be avoided at all costs.¹⁰⁶ In Parisian court circles it had been widely accepted from the start that a small number of sets would be withheld for the royal family and one set placed in the Royal Library,¹⁰⁷ but even Marigny's successor, the count of Angiviller, had difficulty securing copies and a request from Attiret's brother for samples of his sibling's work was ultimately refused—Bertin, on the other hand, did manage to secure a set for himself.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ See comments by Cochin and Jombert, Szrajber, "The *Victories*," 28.

¹⁰⁵ *Lettres Édifiantes*, vol. 24 (1781), 334.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Bertin's letter to Marigny (Cordier, *La Chine en France*, 59) and a Mémoire of 1775 from the office of the Count of Angiviller (Marigny's successor) to the Controller of Finances, Joseph Marie Terray, in which it is suggested that if the emperor became aware that prints were being circulated in France, the chief Cohong merchant Pan would be beaten. A.N. O/1/1913, 24.7.1775. Note also the importance of the printer's "probity." See note 57 above.

¹⁰⁷ Cordier, *La Chine*, 56. Szrajber, "The *Victoires*," 44-5. Eight engravings were presented to Louis XV on June 28, 1772, by a group that included Cochin and the Controller General of Finances, Joseph Marie Terray, who had assumed responsibility for the financial affairs of the defunct Compagnie. The final eight were offered to Louis XVI (r. 1774-92) in the presence of abbé Terray's successor, Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, on July 14, 1775. Beurdeley, *Peintres Jésuites*, 116. For the enquiry from the Count of Angiviller and the rejection of the request from Attiret's brother, see Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 214-217. For Bertin's correspondence with Marigny that secured him a set, see A.N. O/1/1924, 18.5.1771, 15.8.1771, and 29.8.1771. However, other individual prints, and sets, also circulated. One print owned by the Getty Museum bears the holographic inscription on the back stating "Donnée à M. Prévost le 29 novembre 1769 par J. P. Le Bas son ami." See Reed and Demattè, *China on Paper*, 198. For the known location of other partial and complete sets in Europe see *From Beijing to Versailles: Artistic Relations between China and France*, Exhibition catalogue (Hong Kong, 1997), 227.

¹⁰⁸ Pelliot, "Les conquêtes," 217-8. According to Beurdeley, the King's set was mounted under glass and framed in ebony adorned with gold filigree. Beurdeley, *Peintres Jésuites*, 115.

In fact, such was the interest and exclusivity surrounding the prints in France that in 1785, a new set of engravings was produced by Isadore-Stanislas Helman (1743-1809), a student of Le Bas, and the prints issued commercially. Slightly smaller than the originals and of inferior quality, they were published in an album together with four other prints of China, providing further testimony to the sinophilia of the times and ensuring that images of the emperor's battles and victorious army did in fact circulate in Europe more widely than anyone might have anticipated.¹⁰⁹ Bertin's dream of developing a special relationship with the Qing court may have come to naught, but as compensation France had won a place for herself in the art history books by reintroducing copperplate engraving to China—and, in addition, certain individuals in France had acquired a valuable artwork.

China

In Peking, tens of sets of prints, now collated into albums with the emperor's accompanying poems, were distributed to members of the imperial family and officials, including those who had served in the campaign in Xinjiang and their descendents, such as the sons of Shu Hede 舒赫德, Liu Tongxun 劉統勳, and Zhao Hui 兆惠 and the grandson of Ban Di 班第. The addition of the poems (at the top of the set of prints pulled in Peking) was important and not only for reasons of Chinese aesthetics and artistic traditions (Fig. 4). The Manchu generals and officers, who had been clearly identifiable in the original paintings, were now indistinguishable, while the landscapes and settings inevitably bore little resemblance to the natural geography of the region. Nearly twenty years after the battles, many of the protagonists were already dead. Their exploits, no doubt reinvented with each telling, were firmly embedded in family histories, but if that bond of loyalty between the emperor and those who had secured the empire was to be maintained and transmitted to the next generation, then it was essential that these "alien" pictures should be personalized. These were not any old battle scenes suspended in a sort of cultural no-man's land, but particular battles in which certain individuals, notably Manchu individuals, had contributed to the making of the empire in the service of their emperor. It was this specificity, this function as a record of loyalty that

¹⁰⁹ The Helman prints measure approx. 31 × 43 cm. Cordier, *La Chine*, 59-60. One of the additional four prints is entitled "Cérémonie du labourage faite par l'empereur de la Chine," and the other three are headed "Marche ordinaire de l'empereur de la Chine lorsque il passe dans la Ville de Peking."



Fig. 4. Copperplate print of the Victory of Khorgos (1758) with a poem in the hand of the Qianlong emperor. Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

the poems, inscribed by the emperor's own hand, added.¹¹⁰ But while the emperor required loyalty from his Manchu bondsmen, he also sought an acknowledgement of his power and legitimacy from Han officialdom and the wider population.

In 1770 in a conversation between Benoist and the Qianlong emperor (recorded verbatim in the former's letters), the latter, having first established the connection between the Jesuit, his homeland of France, and the overdue engravings, then led the conversation into what amounted to an exploration not of art, but sovereignty. Noting that European prints often depicted the battles of their sovereigns, he enquired against whom these battles were waged, who was the enemy, and was there not one European state that stood above the others and thus had the authority to resolve their differences? In reply Benoist explained that there was indeed an emperor in Germany, but that despite his title he was not sovereign of all the German states and occasionally battled with them. The emperor, it appears, was unimpressed. If all the states were not equal in strength, he persisted, was there not one ruler who attempted to build up his power and establish hegemony? Benoist's explanation, that "since embracing Christianity" one would not anticipate such a revolution, must have appeared as unconvincing to his audience then, as it does now.¹¹¹

The Qianlong emperor was interested less in prints than in power, and more specifically in the art of rulership; victories afforded the victor moral authority and the distribution of prints of Qing victories was an efficient and effective method of publicizing that message while emphasizing the legitimacy of Manchu rule. Thus, the prints were also widely distributed as tokens of appreciation to those who had contributed works from their private libraries to the imperial compilation project of the *Gujin tushu jicheng* and in 1784, the emperor instructed that further sets should be sent to every temporary imperial residence (*xinggong* 行宮) and temple throughout the empire.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Both the Qianlong emperor's preface to the album of prints and the post-face, which bears the names of Grand Councilors, make clear that ten of the poems were written at the time of the production of the paintings and the remaining six were written specifically to accompany the prints. For a reproduction of the preface and post-face, see Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正 ed., *Qingdai yuzhi tongban hua* 清代御製銅版畫 [*Palace Copperplate etchings of the Qing Dynasty*] (Beijing, 1999).

¹¹¹ *Lettres Édifiantes*, vol. 24 (1781), 334-5.

¹¹² Zhuang Jifa, *Qing Gaozong*, 527-8. Weng Lianxi, *Qingdai gongting banhua*, 20. Nie Chongzheng "Qianlong pingding Zhunbu Huihu zhantu," 64. Many of the prints bear the

Over the next fifty years, the Qianlong emperor (and subsequently the Daoguang emperor r.1821-50) had designs of all subsequent major campaigns drawn in the so-called Academy of Painting (*ruyiguan* 如意館) and reproduced as copperplate engravings, probably, in the workshops of the imperial household (*zaobanchu* 造辦處). In total another seven military campaigns were commemorated in this medium.¹¹³ Even a cursory examination reveals the inferiority of these later works. Their cartoonish quality, heavily influenced by wood-block printing, has its own particular appeal, but in terms of skill and craftsmanship they are markedly inferior to those produced in France, a fact that that seems to have been recognized by the Qianlong emperor.¹¹⁴ On average, it took four craftsmen two months to produce one engraving for the prints of the *Pingding liang Jinchuan desheng tu* 平定兩金川得勝圖 (Pictures of the triumphant Jinchuan pacification).¹¹⁵ Thus, while the Chinese artisans had clearly mastered the basic technique of producing copperplate prints, the process was slow and the artistry unremarkable, particularly in the final set. What is striking, however, is that the process of copperplate printing does not appear to have travelled beyond the confines of the palace workshops. Unlike in Europe, there was no attempt to develop the technique, to find a new application for it, nor to commercialize the technology.

In commissioning the copperplate prints, the Qianlong emperor had not intended to forge cultural or economic links with the West, still less

Qianlong emperor's accompanying poems, but whether these were added to the first set of prints pulled in China (begun in 1773), or whether there was a later run is unclear. See <http://www.battle-of-qurman.com.cn/e/hist.htm> (as of March 24, 2009); Szrajber, "The Victories," 36.

¹¹³ Sixteen plates were made for *Pingding liang Jinchuan desheng tu* 平定兩金川得勝圖 (1777-81), twelve of *Pingding Taiwan desheng tu* 平定臺灣得勝圖 (1788-90), six of *Pingding Annan desheng tu* 平定安南得勝圖 (1790), eight of *Pingding Guoerka desheng tu* 郭尔喀得勝戰圖 (1795-6), sixteen of *Pingding Miaojiang desheng tu* 平定苗疆得勝圖 (1795), four of *Pingding Zhongmiao desheng tu* 平定仲苗得勝圖 (commissioned by Qianlong but completed under Jiaqing's rule, 1798), and four for *Pingding Huijiang desheng tu* 平定回疆得勝圖 (1830). Some commentators suggest that a set of copper engravings may have been made of the Ush Rebellion of 1765, but I have found no evidence that these were engravings rather than paintings. *From Beijing to Versailles*, 233.

¹¹⁴ In 1777/78 (Qianlong 42) the emperor sent back two proofs for designs for the *Pingding Jinchuan desheng tu* noting that they compared unfavorably with the earlier series. It is not clear who were the artists, but both the court artist He Qingtai 賀清泰 and Sichelbarth worked on this set. Weng Lianxi, *Qingdai gongting banhua*, 21-23.

¹¹⁵ Weng Lianxi, *Qingdai gongting banhua*, 23.

with any particular European country. Neither had he aspired to introduce a new art form to enhance the décor and splendor of the imperial palaces, nor to establish a new fashion, or provide the Chinese people with a new technology that would replace wood-block printing. His objective was quite simply to acquire for the Qing court, in perpetuity, the technique of detailed copperplate illustration which would provide a new and efficient means of broadcasting and celebrating the dynasty's victories; a ten year wait was a minor inconvenience. As has frequently been noted, when it came to celebrating, recording, and publicizing his achievements within China, the Qianlong emperor was unrivalled. The notion that China's artists should record the glorious achievements of the empire whether military victories, imperial tours or banquets was already well established, as was of course mass production, but what copperplate printing now offered the Qing court was the possibility of reproducing a highly detailed and dynamic visual record of its conquests in almost limitless numbers.¹¹⁶ It was not therefore the cultural cooperation or artistic fusion as characterized by the prints themselves that places them within the early modern framework, but rather the multiplicity of inadvertent interconnections and encounters that the commission engendered, from the Qianlong emperor's first sighting of a Rugendas print in the early 1760s to Helman's reproductions in 1785.

Few works of art can have been vested with such weighty and diverse political agendas: from the delicate balance that the French Jesuits sought to maintain between their supporters in Paris and their masters in Peking to the more profane, self-concerned and mercantile interests of officials and merchants in Canton; from the hopes of those seeking a new rational construct for French power in the wake of the humiliating 1763 Treaty of Paris to the Qianlong emperor's design to bolster old forms of legitimacy with modern technologies, all contributed directly or indirectly to the realization of this project. The copperplate prints of subsequent campaigns are, of course, arguably just as much products of so-called cultural-fusion as the first set (if not more so), but the unique artistry of the prints from the plates produced in France, with all their historical distortions

¹¹⁶ That the use of copper plates offered a form of mass production is a point that has been noted by Joanna Waley-Cohen, see for example, "Military Ritual and the Qing Empire," in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo (Leiden, 2002), 407, 435-436; "Commemorating War in Eighteenth Century China," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 4 (1996): 892.

and visual aberrations, could not and would not ever be replicated; they were the product of a particular social and political moment—a moment that presaged the shared world order of the modern period, a moment before the “idea” of the Other had become rigidified and before competitive state-building engendered the long and arduous struggles of the nineteenth century.