

The Emperor Looks West

An online exhibition of the [Peabody Essex Museum](#)



The Qianlong emperor's

(1711-1799) lavish tastes and avid patronage of the arts distinguished his court with a decidedly cosmopolitan air. His fascination with the world beyond his palace, the Imperial City, manifested in artworks distinctly influenced by a range of cultures and produced by the scores of artists from China, Europe, India and elsewhere who served the emperor. This interactive site features two exceptional works from the exhibition:

Site Requirements:

- > Macromedia Flash Player 8
- > Broadband connection
- > Screen resolution of 800 x 600. Ideally viewed at 1024 x 768 or greater.
- > Sound for the Automation Clock

Victory Banquet at the West Garden, a 19-foot handscroll in ink, vivid mineral pigments and gold is remarkable for its exquisite technique and extraordinary detail. The painting depicts the grandeur of an 18th-century garden banquet celebrating a pivotal military victory and offers a glimpse of a once-closed part of Chinese society — the Imperial City, home of Chinese emperors for 500 years.

"The scroll provides not only a historical record but a rare opportunity to view the pomp and circumstance of court ceremonies and rituals that occurred inside the walls of the Imperial City," says Nancy Berliner, PEM curator of Chinese Art.



Explore the Interactive Scroll

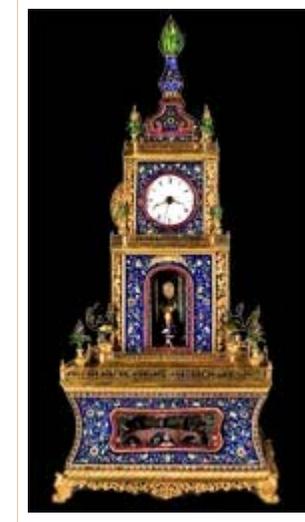
Highlights include details of the imperial barge, the Qianlong emperor arriving on a sedan chair, lavish Central Asian carpets and a monumental Mongolian yurt that served as a temporary outdoor throne room.

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Automation Clock

The bejeweled automaton clock, ca. 1790, was as much an object of amusement and decoration as it was a time-keeping device. *“Videotaping the clock’s movement provides a rare opportunity to witness it in motion,”* says Bruce MaLaren, PEM associate curator of Chinese Art, *“an occurrence that once would have only been viewed by the emperor of China.”*

The Kangxi and Qianlong emperors were fascinated by European clocks, which were often presented as tribute gifts by envoys. In 1689, the Kangxi emperor established the zimingzhongchu (Office of Self-Ringing Bells), an imperial atelier staffed with European and Chinese artisans who produced 190 clocks annually.



[View the Automation Clock Movie](#)

Launch the [Movie](#) link to experience the clock’s delightful performance: the central doors open and close, peacocks flap their wings, flowers twirl and figures appear and disappear, all to the accompaniment of delicately chiming music.