

14 A letter from a Jesuit painter in Qianlong's court at Chengde

*Translated by Deborah Sommer**

This letter, a record by Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot of Jean-Denis Attiret's stay in the Bishu shanzhuang in the summer of 1754, is included in the "Mémoires de la Chine" section of the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites par des missionnaires de la compagnie de Jésus collationnées sur les meilleures éditions et enrichies de nouvelles notes*. My treatment of Chinese terms that cannot be clearly identified follows Amiot's eighteenth-century French romanization.

The translators have attempted to preserve the original tone of this eighteenth-century missive, which sounds somewhat florid and overwrought to modern ears; it nevertheless engages modern readers as it no doubt engaged its original intended audience with tales of the Great Wall and dialogs with the exotic and distant Emperor of China himself. This document provides a unique perspective on the personality of Qianlong and on everyday life at Chengde, as it relates an almost hour-by-hour description of Attiret's visit there. It intimates both the seriousness of the pressures concomitant to choreographing an important political event and the occasional pettiness (and, more often, attentive courtesy) of the bureaucrats in Qianlong's service, those gentlemen who, Amiot remarks, "received our dear Brother with all the demonstrations of politeness and graciousness that these gentlemen know how to provide so well when they believe themselves to be conforming to the intentions of their master." Amiot relates Attiret's sojourn in Chengde with vivid imagery, cutting characterization, and an almost manipulative dramatic flair that evokes in the reader an empathetic appreciation of the physical and psychological rigors Attiret experienced in Qianlong's service. This description of Chengde was recorded outside the official bureaucracy by foreigners who probably believed their correspondence was secure from Han or Manchu eyes, for otherwise Amiot would never have satirized Qianlong's journey to Chengde as a bumbling comedy of errors. Since the Jesuits expressed fealty only to their own Christian god, it is hardly surprising that this letter scarcely portrays Qianlong as a bodhisattva in human guise; he appears instead as an uncompromising but appreciative taskmaster, at times almost comically vain but always marvelously wily and not ungenerous.¹

Letter from P[ère] Amiot, Missionary in China, to P[ère] de la Tour, of the same order. Peking, October 17, 1754.

My reverend Father,

... I am going to tell you about some things that personally concern Brother Attiret. I will tell of his travels in Tartary in the retinue of the Emperor, of his nomination to the mandarinship, and of his generous refusal of a dignity that, by giving him a rank in the empire, would have allowed him to forget, at certain moments, the state of humility to which he has consecrated himself for the love of our sovereign Master, and to which he has with a good heart sacrificed his talents in being the simple Brother of our order.

The reason the Emperor wanted to have Brother Attiret in Tartary and then compensate him by making him a mandarin of the tribunals of his house demands some explanation. I will give it to you, adding some necessary preliminaries, accompanying them with all the circumstances that have some bearing on the topic.

At long last a revolution occurred in the country of the Zunghars, among the Tartar sovereigns whose states are bordered in the middle by Tibet; bordered on the east by Tartars who are tributaries of China, the Khalkhas, and the Mongols; bordered on the west by Muslim Tartars and nomads; and bordered on the north by a part of Siberia. After the death of the last Zunghar, a lama of royal blood placed himself at the head of a powerful faction and came finally to be recognized, despite his contenders, particularly those who wanted, naturally, to occupy the throne.

This new sovereign, an agitated and turbulent man, fearless and inflated with his first successes, wanted new conquests, and he was confident in his ability and good fortune. He found it distasteful that the Khalkhas, his neighbors, were tributaries of China, and he convinced himself of subjugating them. He submitted to the Emperor the ridiculous proposition that he [the emperor] cede them to him, alleging that it was a right owed to his crown that Zunghars of old had enjoyed, and alleging that he was well resolved to employ all his forces in order to enjoy them himself.

The Emperor responded to these pretensions only by inviting him to become a tributary of the empire, offering to make him an official of the first rank and maintain him upon his throne. The lama-become-Zunghar felt his pride offended at such a proposition. He responded that he was in his state as sovereign as the Emperor was in his, that he cared nothing for official rank, that he was declaring war, and that arms would decide who of the two would receive homage and tribute from the Khalkhas.

Of course there were many malcontents among the subjects of the usurper, and as their discontent was only waiting for a favorable occasion to explode, the most enlightened of them concluded that they must profit from the good will that they supposed the Emperor would show to those who declared themselves enemies of that tyrant. They secretly formed their

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plot; ten thousand of them fled their country and came with their families and all their baggage to present themselves before the Emperor and recognize him as their sovereign and master.²

The Emperor received them with open arms; he gave them a site in Chinese Tartary where he permitted them to establish themselves. He named some mandarins to check to see that they did not lack anything – or, more likely, to check on what they were doing. He sent them great sums of money and provisions of all kinds in great quantity; in a word, he put them in a position to lead in their new home much more comfortable lives than they had enjoyed in their own country. There were among the immigrants a good number of people of distinction. The Emperor ordered them to come to Jehol [Chengde], a place in Chinese Tartary where he went each year to enjoy hunting and where he had palaces almost as beautiful as the ones he had in Peking. His Majesty's intention was to receive them in a ceremony where he would consider them his subjects, giving a great banquet governed by the rites for these kinds of occasions, and to decorate them with the same dignities that, according to birth and according to the rank they occupied, they would have hoped to have had in their own country, had they been in favor.

The new settlers went without delay, with a number of people determined by the Emperor, to the place where they had been ordered to go, and when everything was in place, the Emperor himself then set out from the Yuanming yuan and headed for Jehol, accompanied by all his court, officials, counts, and all the great officers, with the exception of a small number who stayed in Peking to take care of his affairs in his absence.

It is only when the Emperor is absent that the people who work under his eyes have a little liberty. Brother Attiret wanted to take advantage of this at the outset by renewing in fervor, through going on retreat (which we do each year for eight or ten days), the spiritual forces that one needs here more than anywhere else. He went into retreat on the evening of the sixth day of the fifth moon, not the slightest bit aware of what was to come. The next day, around four o'clock in the morning, Count Te [i.e. De], a great courtier of the Emperor,³ arrived at Haidian with a posting, with the order from His Majesty to bring Brother Attiret to Tartary. This dear Brother, as I have already said, had gone to Peking to go on retreat; thus he had to come here again to receive the order to set out. Two mandarins had been deputed for that, and Count Te waited in his lodgings in Haidian, where he wanted to stay to get a little rest. Brother Attiret, who had been happy to have had eight whole days to spend with only his God, drew himself out of his solitude the day after he had started it and left at once to go to the Count, to discern more clearly His Majesty's intentions. As soon as the Count saw him, he told him that he was only ordered to tell him that they should start without delay, that the Emperor wanted them with him within three days at the latest, and that other than that he did not know what was wanted of him, but that it was probable

that His Majesty wanted him to draw portraits of some of the most important foreigners that he would receive in a ceremony as his own subjects. "Don't bother with anything," added the Count; "here are fifty taels that the emperor has ordered me to give you; think only of setting out as soon as possible. It would be best if we could set out today. I've been ordered to furnish you with all that is necessary for you and your servants. I will give you my own horse; from among my clothes choose those that fit you best, and use those." One must note that here there are town clothes and travel clothes, determined by their length, shape, and by what is worn with what, and it would be the worst indecency to appear at court in clothing inappropriate to the occasion, place, and season.

As for the horse, Brother Attiret thanked the Count, telling him that the mule that he rode every day to go to the palace would service him just as well for travel; but he accepted the clothing, because it was impossible for him, as well as for us, to make in such a short space of time what he needed. Thus this dear Brother gave no more thought to ordinary preparations. He stayed in our house at Haidian, where he spent the rest of the day preparing his colors and other art supplies in the event that he might need them. It was a good thing, we will see later, that he took such precautions. He wrote us a note to tell us that the next day he would set out. I went with P[ère] Benoist to bid him farewell, and on the eighth day of the fifth moon (June 26), we accompanied him before three o'clock in the morning as far as the lodgings of the Count, where this gentleman was waiting for him to mount his horse.

The twenty-eighth of the same month, our travelers passed through *Nan-ting-men*, which is the first entry into the mountains, and at noon they crossed the Great Wall. "This title is too simple," Brother Attiret wrote me, "for such a beautiful thing. I am astonished that, as many Europeans as have seen it, they have left us unaware of the immense work that it entailed. It is one of the most beautiful works in the world, regardless of the age, the place, or the nation that imagined or executed it. I am firmly resolved to make a sketch of it on my return."

Despite the fact that many missionaries had spoken so much of the Great Wall, all they said paled before the image Brother Attiret conceived of it. Artists see the world with eyes different from those of ordinary travelers. It is to be hoped that this dear Brother would, in his moments of leisure, paint for us a work of what had struck him so vividly. But it seemed that he would not be able to do it soon, being charged with other matters more important and more pressing for him.

The same day, they arrived at *Leang-kien-fang*, where the court had stopped for a few days of rest. The *te-kong* [i.e. Count Te] had given an account of his mission, and he was ordered by the Emperor to give the care of Brother Attiret into the hands of the Count Minister, which he did without delay. The latter received our dear Brother with all the demonstrations of politeness and graciousness that these gentlemen know how to

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provide so well when they believe themselves to be conforming to the intentions of their master; but he did not tell him the reason he had been brought there; he informed him that he knew nothing. He ordered that a tent be put up near his own at once, for along the route there were neither lodgings nor houses for anyone; the palaces that were found at some distance from one another were only for the Emperor and his women. As night was falling, things had to be done quickly, scarcely providing the stability necessary to prevent the various accidents that could happen in the event of a storm. In fact, as soon as Brother Attiret was settled, the sky, which had been overcast, discharged a deluge of water that inundated the whole area. The steward of the Minister, who had come himself to see if anything was needed, reassured the poor Brother, who, little accustomed to camping *à la tartare*, began to be worried lest the double canvas of the tent eventually succumb under the enormous weight that had already begun to make it sag. He told him that he could relax, that he must not touch anything, and that the water would flow off itself, after which he retired. The rain grew heavier each moment, however, and soon the tent shook. Our traveler's two servants, as green as their master and no less embarrassed than he was by their ineptitude, began to shout that it was going to fall. Brother Attiret saw in effect that the poles or stakes that had been fixed in the ground to keep the tent up were coming out of their holes little by little. He rushed to hold one, ordering one of the servants to hold up another while the other servant went for help. They were not long in this predicament; one of the Minister's people arrived just in time with a dozen slaves, and in a few moments all was in good order. Thus our Brother got off only slightly shaken.

Nothing in particular happened to him during the remainder of the journey, which continued a little more smoothly than in the first few days. He was in the retinue of the Emperor, and he was not going faster than His Majesty. The march of the prince, as he envisioned it, inspired picturesque images, but he admitted that, if he were painting an army in disarray, he would have had an excellent model before his eyes. He did not distinguish in any fashion that majesty, that economy, that order that characterized all Chinese ceremonies. He saw nothing but a confused mass of people of all ranks going hither and thither, pushing, shoving, running, some to dispatch orders and others to execute them; some searching for masters they had lost in the crowd; some looking for their section or going to join the ranks of the Emperor, from whom they had become separated. All that he saw seemed a tumult, a confusion, an obstruction; there were only pitiful, lamentable, and tragic creatures that inspired in him fear, horror, and compassion. Here were overturned carts that people tried vainly to upright, camels stretched out with all their baggage, heaving anguished cries with each blow struck to get them up; here were destroyed bridges, exhausted horses, men dead, dying, or injured, trampled by the feet of horses or crushed under the wheels of carts that ran over their

bodies; perplexed riders in the fracas trying to extricate themselves from the mess: such are the images that, coming out of his brush, he never would have dared title "The March of the Emperor of China." One must not believe, however, that all the travels of the Emperor were like this; this was an extraordinary event, and never had the prince had so many in his retinue. He wanted to give to the foreigners who had delivered themselves to him as his own subjects an idea of his power and greatness, and he wanted do it in such a way that if some among them took a fancy to leave, they would, in recounting to their compatriots what they had seen, inspire in them a just fear of troubling him or draw them under his allegiance: an artifice that succeeded perfectly, because ten thousand people were still behind him wearing his colors.

As soon as Brother Attiret arrived in Jehol, the Minister housed him in his own lodgings, where he gave him the best room. He paid him the honor of visiting him in the evening and extended all kinds of obliging assistance; he promised, among other things, that he would serve him *maigre* on the days that our religion does not permit us to eat meat. What was infinitely gracious on his part is that despite all the affairs he was in charge of, he wanted to take care of everything himself to the last detail. He added, before ending his visit, that the Emperor probably wanted Attiret to make a drawing of the fête that was going to take place, although he was not sure. It was the second of July; the Brother rested until July 4, without knowing what was wanted of him.

After his return he was able to tell me that Jehol was little more than a third-rate city that had nothing of beauty except the Emperor's palace. Jehol is situated at the base of a mountain and is watered by a river that is quite small but that enlarges from time to time in a terrible manner, either through snow melt or by an abundance of rain; it then becomes a furious torrent that no dam can stop. A few years ago a part of the palace was destroyed; the damage came to great sums as much because of the quantity as of the quality of the furnishings that were lost or ruined.

Jehol began to amount to something under Kangxi; since then, it has always grown and is becoming a sizable place under the current Emperor, who comes each year for several months with his court and who has built a number of buildings and other works that embellish the place and make it a very agreeable abode during the three months of great heat that we have here.

On July 4, at eleven o'clock in the evening, Brother Attiret was notified of an order of the Emperor: this was to go the next day to the palace, where the Count would tell him what to do. He obeyed, and he learned that the intention of His Majesty was that he paint or at least sketch all that would occur in the ceremony that was going to take place. It was strongly recommended that he locate himself where he could see everything, lest something be forgotten from his sketch and so that the Emperor would be satisfied.

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A capable painter would not be at all perplexed by a similar order in Europe, where he is permitted some embellishment and where, in keeping to the truth, he could give free rein to his genius, less in fear of being disavowed than sure of being applauded. But it is not the same here: one does only what one is told and does what one is told to the letter. It is not genius that is valued. The most beautiful lights must be snuffed out as soon as they appear if they lead to something that is not positively asked of one.

All these thoughts in mind, and filled with a great store of goodwill, Brother Attiret gathered all his fiber, went to the place of the ceremony, assisted to the end, saw everything with his own eyes, and, in spite of all that, didn't know how to approach his subject. He was confused and confounded by all the choices he had to make. He saw everything and saw nothing. The order to go to work at once was given as soon as the ceremony had ended. He was told by the Emperor that the sketch had to be delivered that same evening to Count Te, who would take it to His Majesty, who wanted to see it. He had nowhere to turn, as the Brother realized all too well. He took the path back to the lodgings of the Minister, retired soundlessly to his room, and set himself to executing his orders. He sharpened several pencils like a man trying to gain time, and still nothing came to him. Finally he seized upon his point of approach. This was the moment of the Emperor's entry into the site of the ceremony; a moment flattering to this prince, where one saw at a glance all the magnificence of his grandeur. He rapidly sketched all that this offered, and several hundred figures of many different types appeared in rough outline. Time passed more swiftly than he wanted, and Count Te was at his door. He had to deliver the work before nightfall, which required some effort. He went to the palace himself to find out His Majesty's response. He was most flattering. The Emperor told him, by way of the Count, that everything was "*hen-hao*," that is, "very good."

Here is the place to describe this ceremony, or at least to give a brief outline of it. I would do this with pleasure, if, after having seen the sketch that had been done for the Emperor, and after having heard the explanation from the mouth of Brother Attiret, I had not learned that the ceremony in question is very nearly the same as that done under Kangxi in the year 1691, which P[ère] Gerbillon has described in detail in his third voyage to Tartary, which you will find at some length in the fourth volume of P[ère] DuHalde. Thus, my Reverend Father, it is to this account that I take the liberty of referring you. I can say nothing better or of greater circumstance than you would read there.

The next day, the Brother, being inclined to retouch his design, was interrupted suddenly by a messenger from the Emperor, who notified him of an order to go to the palace, where His Majesty had decorated with the titles of Dignitary, Count, and Grand Lord, eleven of the most important immigrants, who, with all of their retinue, were sanctioned as

members of the state and subjects of the prince who governed it. It was to do the portraits of these eleven lords on whom this honor had been bestowed that the painter had been summoned. One of these portraits was finished the same day and shown at once to the Emperor. He found it a marvel. His Majesty informed Brother Attiret that, before the fête ended in the next six days, he had to complete the portraits of the others. He would have liked to have had a little time to himself to take a breather and to rid himself of a malady that he had contracted by the change of climate and diet, and he would have liked the leisure to get rid of it entirely, or at least to alleviate it a little. He had been attacked by a chest cold, accompanied by a course of wind and a very violent fever. Despite this triple discomfort, which lasted for some time, he had to go to the palace each day, working from morning to night in a place that was virtually a public space, since it was the hall where the courtiers assembled to attend the performances and other events they took part in. "What made my malady infinitely worse," said Brother Attiret, "is that they were on my back all day, asking me a thousand questions, all different, which I had to answer while working at the same time." A single word would have delivered him of all these importunities; but he dared not say anything, because these were none other than the dignitaries, counts, and the highest grand lords of the empire. He felt moreover that these lords did this only to honor him, for the greater part of their questions were about France or about those things they believed would please him. This state of constraint, combined with forced labor and his three maladies, soon drained him of his strength. The mandarin who served as an attendant for him seriously warned Count Te to present a supplication to the Emperor to inform him of Brother Attiret's condition. Count Te himself saw that this was indeed the case and hastened to act accordingly. The Emperor ordered that his painter rest and sent him one of his doctors to care for him. After a day of rest, the patient believed himself strong enough to continue his work. He returned to the palace, where he finished, within the set time, the eleven portraits with which he was charged.

It is said that the Tartars [i.e. Western Mongol defectors to the Qing], little accustomed to seeing themselves reproduced thus, marveled at recognizing themselves on canvas and seeing themselves with all their accouterments. They laughed at one another until, after a few strokes of the brush, they perceived a little resemblance; when they were finished, however, they were ecstatic. They little understood how this could be done: they could not keep themselves from watching the palette and brush; none of the painter's actions escaped them. The Chinese and Manchu lords who were present laughed also with all their hearts, not at the copies, but at the originals themselves, whose faces, appearance, and every mannerism had so little in common with Chinese politesse and manners. Probably of all those there, only the painter was not at ease. He had to respond to several people at once; he wanted the Emperor to be satisfied

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with his work, and he had to seize instantly each feature he wanted to paint. Even had he been in good health, I do not think he would have laughed.

As each portrait was done, however, it was presented to the Emperor, who examined it at his leisure and made his judgment upon it, which the Eunuchs of the Presence announced immediately to the Brother when they returned the painting. As all the judgments were flattering and honorable to the painter, of which each time it was said "*hen-hao, hen-hao*," that is, "very good, very good," they elicited all kinds of compliments and marks of affection from the great ones who amused themselves by watching him paint. What increased their estimation of him even more is that each day a mandarin in ceremonial attire brought him meals from the table of His Majesty, bringing them in front of everyone, most of whom would have been very happy to have enjoyed the same honor. The matter went so far in this regard that Count Te grew jealous. He was unable to hide it: and, as if he wanted to avenge himself of some wrong that had been done to him, or because he wanted to diminish the joy he imagined was in Brother Attiret's heart, he often said, mockingly, "Sir, here it is quite different than in Peking or Haidian, where one cannot see the Emperor so easily; I am offended that His Majesty does not come to enjoy himself by watching you paint."

If this courtier had known the true sentiments of the person he wanted to annoy, he certainly would not have entertained such a discourse, because at the very time this dear Brother was heaped with courtesies and honors by the grandees and by the Emperor himself, he wrote me with an open heart: "I would prefer that this comic act finishes: far from the house of God and deprived of spiritual succor, I have difficulty persuading myself that this might be for the glory of God."

After the eleven portraits were finished and approved by the Emperor, the painter received an order to enlarge the sketch of the ceremony, which he thus far had made only in a smaller version. Another room in the palace was assigned to him, and it was Count Te who had to take him there and set him up. It seems as if this Count scarcely suspected the Emperor would visit this place, because when he entered he spitefully addressed the Brother, saying: "And you won't see him today, either; this is scarcely a place His Majesty frequents." The Brother did not respond but set himself to work. He had barely started when a Mandarin of the Presence came ceremoniously to give him two pieces of silk from the Emperor. A moment later the Emperor himself entered and good naturedly asked the Brother if he was free of his malady, watched him work for a moment, asked him some obliging questions, after which he left; but in leaving he told the Count that Brother Attiret should not be there but should be placed at once in the *ta-tien*, that is, in the throne room.

He had to obey. The Count himself took some of the painter's gear and helped him move so that he could do so more promptly. Arriving in

the hall, Brother Attiret saw a mandarin coming toward him, carrying in his two hands, which were raised to the level of his eyes, a paper of a special kind, and which the Emperor used sometimes for painting. The mandarin told the painter, in giving him the paper, that the intention of His Majesty was that he draw a certain Tartar gentleman on horseback pursuing a tiger, bow drawn, about to let the arrow fly; he added that the Emperor wanted to do the painting himself. Brother Attiret did what was expected of him. The next day he received an order to prepare four pieces of the fine, gummed silk that the Chinese use for painting water-colors. He was then to take them to the garden to find views and scenes to serve as backgrounds for the paintings he would do of the games and amusements of the actual celebration, with the exception of the performances and bright firework displays; these games were for the most part just acrobatic performances, horse races, and military exercises. Reading the third voyage of P[ère] Gerbillon in Tartary, which I have already told you about, will give you an idea of what these were.

Brother Attiret did all that was ordered of him each time. Arriving at the garden with Count Te, who never left him, he put some of his ideas on paper and sketched everything he thought he could use in his drawing. The Emperor saw him from afar, came over to him, examined what he had just done, changed what was not to his taste, and added what he judged proper. He did him the honor of asking him whether he was tired and specially advised him to walk slowly. When he finished, the Brother returned to the palace to work on his drawings. Two entire days passed without him seeing His Majesty and without being disturbed. He took advantage of this to continue his work.

On the morning of the third day, the Emperor honored him with a visit. He wanted to see all that had been done and found that the figure of his person, which had been drawn on horseback in one scene and carried in a chaise in another, leaned a little too far backward in both instances. He wanted this mistake corrected at once, and in order to facilitate this he sat on his throne, which was right there; he acted out what he had in mind, and a drawing was made of his position. As it was very hot, he had the goodness to order the Brother to remove his hat and sit down – a singular favor that he accorded none of his other subjects, who had either to kneel or stand in his presence, even while working.

The Emperor returned the next day. A eunuch carried in his hands the painting His Majesty had done himself over the sketch of the Tartar on horseback, of which I have spoken above. He displayed it before the Brother and ordered him to retouch the posture of the rider, who was just about to let his arrow fly. After that slight correction, the painting was returned to the chambers of His Majesty, who wanted to work on it some more. But that same evening it was sent to Brother Attiret, with the order to finish it. There only remained the quiver, the horse's tail, and the rider's boots. I forgot to say that the Emperor early that morning had

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asked Brother Attiret whether he still had some Korean paper, oiled and ready for the application of colors – without saying, nonetheless, what he wanted to do with it. As the Brother responded that he had none left, the Count was ordered to dispatch a courier to Haidian immediately to request a sheet from Brother Castiglione, who had some prepared.

While the courier was on the road, Brother Attiret lost no time. In addition to the sketches I have mentioned, he still had to do the portraits of the most important lords who were to be included in the painting of the ceremony; all the portraits had to have the approval of His Majesty, which augmented his difficulties not a little. He had to redo two of them several times, as the Emperor did not find them to his taste; that of the Count Minister was completely off because of the desire that he resemble it so closely. The Emperor wanted the eyes done in a certain way that flattered the man most, wanted his head to be more or less leaning forward, and wanted him to have such and such a posture; but all this was not forthcoming from the imagination of the painter, who exerted all his efforts to comply with the prince's wishes. But he was so bewildered by all these difficulties that he lost sight of his model, no matter what he did to finish the painting. The Minister offered some less-than-subtle criticism, giving him to understand, nevertheless, that it was not his fault. All the other portraits were considered marvels; His Majesty acclaimed them highly, and hence the entire court lavished praise on them as well.

But all this was just the beginning, so to speak, for the painter. The courier returned with the canvas – or more correctly, the prepared paper – that he had procured in Haidian. As soon as the Emperor was apprised of his return, he betook himself to the room where Brother Attiret was working; he sat upon the throne and ordered that he be painted life-size. The Brother had not yet had this honor. Since the Emperor and all his court thought the other portraits were good, this one had to be excellent. And the painter surpassed himself. Since he had to do it on the spot, there was more imagination in the painting. Before he brought forth a single brush stroke and before the first sketch was even done, the Emperor exclaimed, as he arose, "This is very good! This is very good! I have been here for two hours, and that is enough for today!" What the prince found most flattering in the portrait was to see himself with a large head that seemed a size larger than usual. He had hinted more than once that he wanted to be painted thus; in all his portraits he had always found his head had been made too small. But not a word had been heard about this before, and no one was aware of his views on this matter. It had been thought enough to increase his natural size with a few lines, and even then one thought one had overdone it. His Majesty did not think it fitting to explain himself on those other occasions more clearly, and he did not explain himself in this last instance, either. Just as Brother Attiret took up the palette and brushes, a eunuch opposite him put his two hands upon his head and spread them far apart; he pointed with his fingers, when the Emperor was not looking, as if he wanted to tell the

Brother that His Majesty wanted to be painted with a very large head. Another eunuch made it known in so many words in a tone of voice loud enough that the Emperor could hear, and His Majesty confirmed, with a sign of approval, what he had just said. The painter needed no more prompting, for it was as good as said; he acted accordingly, and brought off what was in all senses a marvel.

As soon as the Emperor retired, Brother Attiret worked later on the portrait and did all the brush work he believed necessary for a perfect resemblance, employing all his skills to enhance it. Some days later, His Majesty having seen it and finding it much more to his liking than the first time, complimented the painter and patted him affectionately. The desire to be reproduced in color increased in him as soon as these colors represented his person as he wished to be. He sent the Brother to the garden to get some ideas for the background of a scene where he wanted to be depicted shooting an arrow. After the Brother had sketched in the landscape and all else he believed necessary to embellish his subject, the mandarin who oversaw these kinds of works carried it to His Majesty, who approved it with acclaim. Now the Count had just been charged with another errand, and he had to carry out His Majesty's orders at some distance. He left on the eleventh of the sixth moon, but before his departure he went back to the lodgings of the Minister to take his leave of him. As he went out, Brother Attiret heard him and ran ahead to wish him bon voyage. The former did not respond to his greetings except for some perfunctory compliments of felicitation. The Brother did not doubt in any way but that all these compliments were heaped upon him because the Emperor's portraits had succeeded so well. He replied with the usual responses; but when some moments later a lower-ranking mandarin congratulated him in almost the same terms and in what seemed to him to be a somewhat singular manner, he had the curiosity to ask why, specifically, he was proffered these felicitations. The man complimenting him, greatly astonished, told him quite simply that he rejoiced with him that the Emperor had made him a mandarin. "Me, a mandarin?" replied Brother Attiret. "Yes, you, a mandarin," he replied coldly. "What! All the court knows, and you have not been told yet!" And so on. The poor Brother was a little dismayed at this news; but as he had been prepared for this for quite some time, he thought only of finding some means of parrying this blow without offending the Emperor. . . .

[Attiret learns that because Qianlong is so pleased with his work, particularly with the life-size portrait, that he is to be made a mandarin of the fourth rank. The Jesuit Attiret, not concerned with worldly rewards, tactfully declines this honor. He nevertheless continues to paint for Qianlong and sees him almost daily at Jehol for the remainder of his sojourn there.]

Although Brother Attiret did not enjoy very good health, he was obliged nevertheless to paint from morning to night with no rest other than that

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afforded at meals and at night. Still he was obliged to get up from his sleep to devise different compositions in his sketches and paintings. He was in Tartary only fifty-odd days, and of those only forty were devoted to work, and during this short space of time he made twenty-two portraits in oils, four large sketches, both of the ceremony and of other events, and a quantity of other things, each of which itself would have demanded, even in more favorable circumstances, one or two days of work. Thus he was so overwhelmed and so dispirited that he was unrecognizable on his return. We found him thin, pale, bent over at the back, and walking only with great difficulty and pain. He had contracted, as much by the fatigue of Jehol as by that of the journey, a kind of sciatica that obliged him to stay in his room more than fifteen days after his arrival here; but thanks to the Lord, the rest returned his strength to him, and he is in good health today. He must make the same journey again before long, because the Emperor will perform the same ceremony for new immigrants who number almost ten thousand, as I have said above. It seems that he will have things a little easier than the first time, because P[ère] Siguelbarth and Brother Castiglione, painters like himself, must accompany him; moreover, it is very probable that the three painters will not be called on to do anything more than draw the portraits of the most important of the new arrivals, since all the rest have already been painted by Brother Attiret.⁴

Notes

- * The translator is grateful for the assistance of Louis Dupont with some of the eighteenth-century French terminology.
- 1 Notable correspondence by Jesuits in overseas missions was published by the order in collected volumes titled *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, which were reprinted in various later selected editions. This letter is from the "Mémoires de la Chine" section of just such a collection, the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites par des missionnaires de la compagnie de Jésus collationnées sur les meilleures éditions et enrichies de nouvelles notes*, vol. 36, 246–299.
 - 2 The malcontents referred to here include Tsereng, with his Dörböt followers. Amursana had not yet, or had only just, allied with the Qing. For background on these Mongol affairs, see Millward, Chapter 8.
 - 3 The editor has not been able to establish the identity of "Count Te" definitively, but the best guess is that Attiret's escort was Delge (Ch. De-le-ke; ?–1794), a Mongol Borjigid descendent from the Barin *aimagh*. Eldest son of second-rank Prince (*junwang*) Lin-qin, in 1750 Delge married the Hewan hošoi gungju, a second-rank princess, the daughter of the Qianlong's younger brother, Hongzhou. Because his health was poor, Delge did not inherit the rulership (*wang*) of the *aimagh*, but lived in Beijing, where he used his noble status as *gong* (usually "duke," but here evidently translated by the Jesuits as "count," as in Amiot's "*te-kong*") to maintain his presence at court (hence Amiot's "courtier" rather than "minister"). He did some translation work in the Manchu Classics Translation Office. It seems that such a hanger-on imperial son-in-law, with rank but not much to do, would be just the sort of person designated as Attiret's handler. It would also explain Count Te's grumbling at the imperial honors bestowed on

Attiret. Gao Wende *et al.*, *Zhongguo minzu shi renwu cidian*, 599; Evelyn Rawski, personal communication, February 15, 2000.

- 4 Editors' note: These new arrivals were very important indeed, for they included the Khoit *taisha* Amursana, a major defection from the Zunghars, whom the Qianlong emperor went to great lengths to honor. Because ceremonial duties kept him in Beijing until December 22, Qianlong traveled in a three-day forced march to the Bishu shanzhuang, where Amursana and other Western Mongols had already arrived. The banquets and enfeoffment ceremonies for these Khoit and Dörböt leaders were held December 25–26, ensuring that the Jesuit painters passed a cold and cheerless Christmas that year. *QLSL*, 19.10.18 *guihai* (473: 3a–4a); 19.11.12 *dinghai* (476: 12a); 19.11.13 *wuzi* (476: 12a–13a).

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New Qing Imperial History

The making of Inner Asian empire
at Qing Chengde

Edited by
James A. Millward,
Ruth W. Dunnell,
Mark C. Elliott, and
Philippe Forêt

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