

Inscribed on a plate

-On war pictures and other copperplate prints from the Qing court

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Abstract: Copper engravings at the Qing court were an important element in the cultural exchange between East and West in the 18th century. This paper compares the entire process of the spread of copperplate painting during the Ming and Qing dynasties, its roots at the Qing court, its development, its prosperity and its decline. The paper examines the key figures and historical information about the cultural exchange between East and West involved in this history, and makes an analysis and judgement on the production techniques and materials of representative works at each stage based on the most recent documentary sources. This has positive implications for the development of contemporary Chinese copperplate.

Keywords: Qing dynasty palace copper engravings, early Chinese and Western cultural exchange, engraving method, etching method

I

Copper engravings have been developed in Europe for nearly six hundred years, before the development of photographic reproduction printing, and were often used as a printing method to reproduce oil paintings and to produce book illustrations. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, copperplate illustrations were brought to China by Western missionaries and were mainly used to promote Christian doctrine. The natural combination of reproduction and edification made it an important medium of communication for the Chinese to keep abreast of modern Western culture.

During the Ming Dynasty, **Matteo Ricci (1552-1610)**, an Italian Jesuit missionary, came to China with copperplate prints such as *The Virgin Embracing the Holy Child*, with pictures of

The way in which the ministry of Christ was spread to the Chinese. Cheng Yi's *Cheng's Inkwell* had been copied on woodblock. As the English art historian Sullivan put it, "Although the paintings brought by the Jesuits were more appreciated, it was ultimately the book illustrations and engravings that had a wider impact, as they were easier to circulate widely and to reproduce in large numbers or to be adapted by Chinese woodblock engravers."^[1] As a result of the West's emerging modern technology and culture, these beautiful Western copperplates and wonderful Christian stories naturally aroused the curiosity and interest of the Chinese. Two of these Western copperplate books were widely influential: one was *The Bible Story*. It was printed in Antwerp, the famous printing centre of Europe in the 16th century, and published by Plantin-Christoph, the most powerful publisher in Western Europe at that time. The advanced publishing and printing technology and the exquisite illustrations aroused the amazement of the Chinese. The second is *The Illustrated History of the Gospels*, which depicts the contents of the Bible in a continuous manner in the form of copperplate illustrations. The copper plates were mainly produced by the three famous engravers, the Wilkes brothers, after paintings by Paris and Aüss, the famous artists who ran the workshop in Antwerp at the time. The book was already in the possession of Matteo Ricci around 1604 and was exhibited in Beijing, where it was met with astonishment by the noble and scholarly classes of the Chinese Empire.^[2] Copperplate illustration

[22]Continuation of the *Zhi Tongjian Changbian*, vol. 171, '*Renzong Huang You Sun Xue Ganzhi*', p. 4115.

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[25][Song] Le Shi wrote and Wang Wenchu and others edited *The Records of Taiping Huan Yu*, vol. 62, Hebei Dao, China Book Bureau, 2007, p. 1267.

[26][Song] Lu You, *Lao Xue'an Notes*, vol. 2, *Song-Yuan Notes on Fiction (IV)*, p. 3470 pp.

[27][Yuan] Toutou et al, *Song Shi (History of the Song Dynasty)*, vol. 316, Tang Jie zhuan (*The Biography of Tang Jie*), China Book Bureau 1977, pp. 10327 pp.

[28][Song] Shao Bo Wen, *Shao's Record of Hearsay*, vol. 2, China Bookstore, 1983, p. 13.

[29] *Beyoncé (horse)*, p. 3.

[30][Song] Zhou Mi, *Qi Dong Ye Yu*, vol. 1, Wang Duan Ming, China Book Bureau, 1983, p. 16.

[31] *Shao's Record of Hearts and Witnesses*, vol. 2, p. 13.

[32][Song] Zhou Fai (周輝), *Qingbo zhuan (清波杂志)*, vol. 5 (定器),

Song and Yuan notes and novels (宋元笔记小说大观)
(V), Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2001, p. 213.
[33] Fu Zhenlun, Jingdezhen Pottery Records in Detail, vol. 6, Bibliographic
Literature Press, 1993, p.
76 pp.

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98-99 pp.
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- [39] [Song] Zhu Yu (萍洲可談), vol. 1, Quan Song jingji (全宋笔记第二编)(VI), Da Xiang Press, 2006, p. 146.
- [40] [Song] Yue Ke, 'One Hundred Songs from the Palace', in Quan Song Shi, vol. 2973, p. 35402.
- [41] The Tomb of Huang Sheng, Southern Song Dynasty, Fuzhou, Fujian Province, edited by the Fujian Provincial Museum, 1982, relics press
79 pp.
- [42] [Song] Lu You, Lao Xue'an jing (Notes on the Old School), vol. 2, Song-Yuan yu zhi zhi dai guan (Song-Yuan notes and novels) (IV).
- [43] [Song] Zhao Lingyao (趙令畤), Hou Mackerel Jie (侯鯖錄), vol. 6, Song-Yuan Notes on Fiction (II).
- [44] Continuation of Zizi Tongjian Changjian, vol. 13, 'The fifth year of Taizu Kaibao in the seventh month of the Jia Shen', p. 286.
- [45] Song hui yao serie xian - public opinion and clothing IV - ministerial clothing, p. 2236.
- [46] Shao's Record of Hearts and Witnesses, vol. 3, p. 23.

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The realistic visuals and concise narrative helped the Chinese, who knew little about Catholicism, to understand its teachings, and this contributed positively to its spread in China. In fact, in addition to the religious genre, some of the copperplate prints of European architecture and social customs were of greater interest to the Chinese ruling class. After the difficulties he experienced as a "Chinese generalist", Matteo Ricci realised that only by trying to convert the emperor, the highest ruler in China, to Catholicism could he order the spread of the Gospel of Christ throughout the empire. So he tried to get close to the Emperor and, learning of his interest in the architecture of European courts, Ricci duly presented a copperplate print of the palace of San Lorenzo in El Escorial, Spain. The Chinese emperor was captivated by the realistic visual effects and the exquisite detailing of the work, and thus became more curious and interested in Western culture. This 'artistic and cultural missionary' approach, created by Matteo Ricci, suited the cultural preferences of the Chinese and indeed contributed to the influence of Western painting in China and the expansion of Catholicism in the country. Copper engravings played a key role as a medium of cultural transmission. As no one knew the techniques of copperplate making at this time, and European printing machines and materials were never brought to China, it was a hundred years later that attempts were made to produce and print copperplates locally.

II

The publication of copperplate prints at the Qing court began in 1713, the 52nd year of the Kangxi era. The Kangxi Emperor had previously come into contact with and appreciated Western copper engravings through missionaries, and realising the unique value of using copper plates to produce maps and architectural landscapes, invited missionaries familiar with copper engraving techniques to produce and teach copper engravings at the court. The engraving and printing of the 'Thirty-six Views of the Imperial Chengde Summer Resort' by the Italian missionary Ma Guoxian was the first attempt to produce copperplate prints at the Qing court, and the earliest combination of Chinese and Western engraving and printing. (Fig. 1) In addition to this, the Kangxi Emperor also ordered Ma Guoxian to proceed with the production of a copperplate version of the famous map of the Imperial Public Opinion. The map was later divided into 44 pieces, which were engraved and printed by Ma Guoxian, the first application of Western copperplate mapmaking and printing in Chinese history.

Matteo Ripa (1682-1745), a native of Naples, Italy, was appointed by the Pope to come to China in 1710 as a missionary, at a time when the Holy See and China were at loggerheads over the 'liturgical controversy' and missionary work could not progress. Ma Guoxian had to stay at the court of Kangxi as a painter. According to Ma Guoxian's memoirs



Fig. 1 Imperial poem on the Thirty-six Views of the Summer Palace in Chengde, 'Morning Sunset on the Western Ridge' 1713 in the Bayannur Library, China

He had only a cursory knowledge of copperplate, but with the emperor's support, Ma Guoxian, after painstaking attempts to rely on a few substitutes, made copperplate printing materials such as nitric acid and ink, and built a printing press. ⁽³⁾ After he had made real progress in his copperplate skills, Kangxi decided to have him engrave the Thirty-six Views of the Chengde Summer Resort. Together with a Chinese colleague, Ma Guoxian travelled around the summer resorts and sketched the scenes, finally producing a copperplate set with reference to the palace woodcut version. Kangxi liked this copperplate set of landscapes so much that he asked for it to be bound with the poems and then presented to the imperial family as a precious and elegant gift.

As a promising ruler of the Qing dynasty, Kangxi's reign saw a series of foreign military victories that saw the Qing dynasty break through the boundaries of the Ming dynasty. His close contacts with Russia and Europe, his use of Western missionaries with scientific expertise at court, and his collection of a wide range of Western artefacts and publications all underline his more global outlook and political ambition. For Kangxi, the choice of copper engravings for the imperial painting of the Thirty-Six Views of the Summer Villas in Chengde was not simply a matter of novelty, but was really intended to illustrate the fact that the Qing dynasty was an expanding continental empire. ⁽⁴⁾ The Qing emperor wanted to show the outside world his great palaces as distinct from those of European monarchs in a beautiful Western copperplate album. It is clear from the surviving records of Kangxi's correspondence with the Wuyingdian compilation that he was extremely enthusiastic about this work. He participated in it in a highly innovative manner and gave specific advice and guidance on many details of the atlas compilation process. ⁽⁵⁾ His workforce included, in addition to numerous professional engravers, cultural elites such as the Manchu poet and official Kui Xiu (c. 1674-1717) and the Han scholar, bureaucrat and painter Jiang Tingxi (1669-1732), who was responsible for adding all the ancient allusions to the Chinese poetry and diction. Like the design of the summer residence gardens, the summer residence atlases were the product of a multi-ethnic mix of Mongolian and Chinese cultures. Kangxi attempted to use this form of pictorial and poetic collaboration to educate the nascent elite of Qing society, especially those of the Eight Banners of the Manchu and Mongolian communities, conveying a subtle but soft attitude towards the acceptance of and respect for Confucian culture by the Manchus as rulers of the Chinese Empire. It "objectively portrays the Kangxi Emperor as a patriarch of the Han cultural tradition". ⁽⁶⁾ Han

literati who had seen this atlas would have seen that the Kangxi emperor had a great passion for Han culture and would have acknowledged the emperor's high level of training and skill in Han literature.

As a result of the previous Kangxi commentary on the woodcut version of the imperial poem "Thirty-six Views of the Summer Villa in Chengde Acknowledgement of the Figure, Ma Guoxian produced a copperplate in reference to this version

The Imperial Painting of Thirty-six Scenes from the Summer Palace in Chengde. When the two versions are compared, we can see the similarities in composition, content and framing form, but 'this is not a simple imitation or imitation, but a re-creation and re-sublimation of the blueprint'. ⁽⁷⁾ Ma Guoxian applied the information he gathered from his field sketches at the summer residence to his engraving of the poem in copperplate. Particular details unique to the sites of the mountain resort are depicted, such as the curiously shaped mountains and the style of the architectural structures and how these sites existed as part of the emperor's private life. There are two distinctive juxtapositions of style in this collection: one, such as Morning Sun on the Western Ridge, uses Western painting methods to emphasise the effects of light and shadow and perspective, using fine etched copper-plate rows to portray the volume of the mountains and the three-dimensionality of the buildings; the movement of the clouds, the reflections in the water and the branches and leaves of the trees are more detailed and closer to the real visual experience. Another part of the work, such as Cloudy Mountain Resort, refers entirely to Chinese painting methods: the single line outline of the mountains and hills, the chap-dye brushwork of the mountains, the symbolic treatment of the trees, and the large areas of white space. Ma Guoxian attempts to fuse elements of Chinese and Western painting in his group paintings. It is

By adding Western visual elements to a Chinese-style landscape framework, Ma Guoxian's copper engravings achieve a high degree of cross-cultural achievement. ⁽⁸⁾ The publication of *The Imperial Poem on Thirty-six Views of the Chengde Summer Resort* opens up new possibilities for the development of Chinese painting and leaves a valuable source for the study of the history of cultural exchange between the West and China in modern times.

After thirteen years in the Qing court, Ma Guoxian failed to complete his missionary work as he had hoped and, disappointed, pleaded for his return in 1724 ~~on the~~ death of a family member. After receiving permission from the Yongzheng Emperor, he returned to Italy with a large number of precious gifts from the royal family, accompanied by the five Chinese students he had trained. On his way through England, Ma Guoxian presented a copy of the *Royal Public Opinion* to King George I. This book provided an accurate model of Chinese garden architecture and landscape design, enabling the British to visualise for the first time the true image of Chinese garden art, which had a positive and far-reaching impact on the then-emerging garden revolution in Britain and Europe. The impact was positive and far-reaching. As only a very few lucky people were able to see Ma Guoxian's original album, further distribution of these prints was mainly through publishers who dealt in pirated Chinese style albums, reprinting and distributing copies of the originals, producing copperplate variations on the same themes. A booklet entitled *The Chinese Emperor's Palace in Beijing* (fig. 2), which included 20 views of the summer residence, was issued by four London publishers. Eighteen of the 20 plates in this book were reproduced from Ma Guoxian prints, and as it was aimed at a European audience, the images were reinterpreted in a more romantic, 'Orientalist' language. The London engraver added figures, birds and animals and objects in accordance with the customs of the time, and coloured the garden scenes with watercolour to bring them to life, in keeping with the European public's image of Oriental China as

an idyllic land of curiosity and exoticism. For the European elite, the copperplate versions produced by Ma Guoxian conveyed a valuable message of objective fact, rather than just the poetic picture of the Kangxi emperor's gardens, as in the woodcuts. Unlike the magnificent Versailles palace, the buildings shown in the *Thirty-six Views* are simple and frugal, presenting a picture of imperial life in the style of a Confucian gentleman, which reinforces the established image of the Chinese emperor as an enlightened monarch that Europeans were accustomed to seeing.

A pioneering figure in the production of copperplate prints for the Qing dynasty,
Ma

Guoxian first introduced Western copperplate techniques to China. He not only developed the materials needed for copperplate printing, manufactured

and produced by the most famous French royal printmakers, it is exquisitely engraved and carefully printed, and 'represents the highest level of copperplate engraving and printing in Europe at the time'.^[9] The remaining six sets of war maps and the Yuanmingyuan copperplate were painted and engraved by court painters, typical of local copperplate prints, of which the Yuanmingyuan copperplate represents the highest level of local production, marking the

Fig. 2 Inside the Palace of the Emperor of China in Beijing
Copper plate with watercolour colouring
Published 1753

Printmaking machines, and trained the first Chinese to learn the techniques of copperplate making and printing, which paved the way for the large copperplate war picture groups created during the Qianlong period. As an amateur copperplate artist, Ma Guoxian's mastery of copperplate etching techniques was still relatively rudimentary and did not allow for the production of more delicate lines; the lack of materials such as paper and ink also inevitably affected the quality of the printing. According to the latest findings of the Palace's antiquarian Mr. Weng Lianxi, the copperplate version of the Imperial Poems on Thirty-six Views of the Chengde Summer Resort is mainly printed on Kaihua paper, a thin paper produced in Kaihua, Zhejiang Province, China, which was originally used for woodblock prints. There are also a few copies of the Poems on Western paper, which are more effective in comparison. The lack of tools, materials and printing equipment meant that the Poems were slightly inferior in terms of engraving and printing standards to the European copperplate works of the time.

From the end of the Ming Dynasty, when missionaries brought copperplate to China, to the folk copying of Western copperplates with wooden plates, and then to the Kangxi Dynasty, when the missionary Ma Guoxian introduced copperplate printing at the court and created the first large-scale copperplate groups, copperplate was able to gain a foothold in the Qing court, and the whole process took more than a hundred years. The title of 'court' copperplate is a reference to the cultural and political relevance of the 'Kang, Yong and Qian' era.

III

The Qianlong dynasty was a prosperous period for the publication of copperplate prints at the Qing court. The engraving of copperplate prints was a major event, with a total of seven types of copperplate war maps and a set of architectural views of the Western Building in Yuanmingyuan engraved. The most representative copperplate print of the period is The War Picture of the Pingxing of the Junbei Hui. Painted by a missionary painter in China



maturity of palace copperplate production in the Qing dynasty.

The Qianlong emperor (1711-1799), known as the 'Ten Perfect Elders', reigned for 60 years and was at the height of his civil and military powers and the political and economic heights of his empire. Following the example of his grandfather Kangxi, Qianlong also had a wide interest in art, architecture and the decorative arts. He collected not only Chinese works of art, but also works from a wide range of cultures, including Europe. Also as a patron of the arts, 'the Qianlong emperor seems to have realised that prints were the perfect vehicle for conveying cultural and political messages'.^[10] He was keen to spread his political influence through works of art that interpreted and commemorated his achievements as a great ruler on the global stage. About the production

The origin of the copperplate war maps was due to the fact that the Qianlong emperor had seen a set of copperplate war maps by the German painter Lügendaus and found them visually realistic and distinctive, and that they could be printed in limited quantities as a reward for the emperor and his ministers, which was conducive to celebrating royal merit. In addition to the good precedent of the Kangxi dynasty, after each war the Qianlong emperor asked the court painters to draw and make copper plates of war victories based on the major battles and events of the war.

In 1760, following the pacification of the Junggar and Hui rebellions, the Qianlong emperor ordered Lang Shining to draft **16 small drafts of the War Map**. These small drafts were originally designed for the creation of 16 large paintings of the same subject for the Ziguangge, and were the basis for the copperplate sketches of the Battle Maps. Only three black and white drafts depicting battle scenes are known to exist, all of which are held in the collections of the Tenri University Library in Nara, Japan. Take, for example, the sketch depicting a scene from the Battle of Tungusluk (fig. 3). The sketch is similar to a copperplate of the same subject in that the scene is depicted with a brush dipped in ink, outlining the overall composition and layout of the scene, with the mountains and trees outlining the outline and structure, and the armies on both sides outlined only in brief human form and movement, with no discernible detail or identity. Of particular interest is the yellow label attached to each of the 88 soldiers of the Qing army with their names written in Manchu. In the upper right-hand corner are two more yellow labels with the Chinese names of the two most important generals who put down the Huijiang rebellion, Zhaohui and Mingrui.^[11] In 1765, the Qianlong emperor summoned four Western missionary painters from the court, Lang Shining, Wang Zhicheng, Ai Qimeng and Andeyi, to produce more detailed sketches for the copperplate, which were then sent to France, where the French court craftsmen, Kesheng and Lebar, produced a copperplate based on this model. In 1774, **200 copies of each of the 16 copper plates**, together with the drafts and the original plates, arrived in China, taking 14 years to complete.

This set of war maps not only depicts an important period of warfare during the reign of Qianlong

The history also provides an almost complete history of the contact between the French court artists and the Chinese court artists. It is a complex dialogue between different cultural mentalities in the history of cultural exchange between China and Europe, and is very intriguing. During the Kangxi reign, copperplate engraving was carried out at the court under the auspices of Ma Guoxian, but for nearly fifty years afterwards no one else was capable of carrying out this work, so the Qianlong emperor turned his attention abroad from the outset when considering the production of copperplate war pictures: he first went through the Western missionaries at the court to identify the European countries with the best copperplate printing techniques. The French Jesuit, Deng Xuansi, who was living in Guangdong at the time, advised that the most advanced and trustworthy copperplate technology was to be found in France itself.^[12] The Qianlong emperor then ordered the missionaries, including Lang Shining, to take care of the matter and to commission France to produce copperplate war maps, and that "one hundred of the plates printed must be sent back with the original plates". Lang translated the bull into French and sent it to the **Marquis de Marigny**, President of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, with a personal letter. The letter contained two important suggestions: firstly, that the great deeds of the Qianlong emperor should be represented in a refined and elegant manner, using engraving and etching techniques with European characteristics. Secondly, that the original plates be repaired as completely as possible after printing, if they were worn, so that when they were reprinted they would have the same effect as the first printing. This meant that the Qianlong emperor was fully aware of copperplate printing and was considering introducing a full range of copperplate printing equipment and materials through this 'international cooperation project', so that he could print them himself at court in the future. This commission aroused the strong pro-Chinese interest of the French Minister **Henri Bertin**, who stressed the 'commercial, political and religious' advantages of the art project. As a major political and economic opportunity, the finished French artwork would impress the Chinese emperor with France, thereby enhancing the prestige of their country, distinguishing France from other European countries and ultimately facilitating trade between the two countries. The French were particularly pleased that they saw the Chinese emperor's choice of France as "a tribute from the Asian empire to France"^[13]. In fact, Qianlong only wanted the best quality prints, and it is not certain that the emperor expressed any preference for the country that produced the copperplate. In the French rush to make



Fig. 3 The Battle of Tungusluk (sketch), a map of the battle to pacify the Junbu Hui, by Lang Shining, ink and yellow label on paper, in the Tenri University Library, Japan

In reacting with such optimism, they seem not to have noticed that they were only recruited to serve the Qianlong Emperor.

When the original drawing arrived in Paris, Darcy, the director of the French East India Company, visited the Marquis de Marigny, the director of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, and on Marigny's recommendation, decided that **Cochin**, then a leading French copperplate engraver, would supervise the engraving, and selected the best French royal engravers of the time, such as Leuba, Breaux and Alleman, to undertake the work. The work was not always smooth. The production of the plates was not always smooth, and although Wang Zhicheng's and others' sketches were fully detailed, the French engravers did not remain faithful to the originals in the process of transferring them to copperplate, but modified them according to their interpretation. One of Ko-Sheng's supervisory duties included revising the proofs. Charles Antoine Jombert, in his *Catalogue of Cochin's* work, notes that 'bridging the gap between European and Chinese artistic traditions was a difficult task'. Although considered to be the main imperial painter of the Qianlong emperor and by far the most technically accomplished court artist, Lang Shining's status seems insignificant, at least from a French point of view. Similarly, in 1769 the Marquis de Marigny wrote pointedly to Wang Zhicheng that his paintings were 'in the Chinese style, more remarkable for their uniqueness than for their beauty'.⁽¹⁴⁾ In 1767, according to surviving memoranda from the artists and administrators involved, Ko Sheng and the Marquis of Maligny drew up detailed plans for the project, exploring the differences in artistic tastes between Europe and China. Well aware of the difficulties of creating artwork for someone so far removed from French culture, Ko Sheng wrote: (Louis XV's historical paintings) were usually done through symbolic iconography from Greek mythological and religious sources, yet this was an incomprehensible language for the Chinese to the muscular, almost nude male physique and the classical depiction of the artist's beloved horse's torso is completely inappropriate for Chinese audiences. In the end, Ko Sheng proposed adjustments: enhancing the overall design of the architectural boundaries and the dark lighting effects of the figures, as well as conveying the message through the symbolic meaning of certain animal or plant attributes, such as the oak tree as a symbol of glory, strength and indomitable. He believes that interpretation is necessary and that the final work should please everyone, regardless of the viewer's aesthetic maturity. Following the highest standards of quality in 18th-century European classical art, Coatson revised four original drafts created by the missionaries and demanded that French artists should be free to modify anything that did not seem to make sense. Ko Sheng arrogantly pointed out that the Chinese preferred small, subtle works to other effects that reflected artistic talent and flair.⁽¹⁵⁾ The four engravers spent nearly half a year redrawing the four originals painted by the missionaries and began engraving and making plates for the four copper plates in 1767, by which time the remaining **twelve** originals had been shipped from China to France. The first copper plates were partially engraved in 1769. According to contemporary scholar Niklas Leverenz, who has

analysed the different stages of the trial prints of the war drawings that survive in the Louvre, the French engravers first used the etching technique, making the first trial print after the etching was completed. The drawing was then returned to the engraver, who made further engravings and modifications using the traditional engraving knife and pressure-grinding tool, using the engraved line technique, before etching again for a test print. Ko Sheng oversees every stage of the plate making process and his work ethic is so strict that the engraver can only proceed with the next step after receiving his confirmation. It was only when the plate was finally completed that Ko Sheng allowed the engraver to engrave the names of the creators on the underside of the original copper plate, in the order in which they appear on the plate: the name of the original artist and the date in the lower left-hand corner, with

The name of the director, Ko Sheng, and the name and date of the engraver in the lower right-hand corner. Once the plates were made, the complex and labour-intensive printing stage began. The average copperplate printing rate was six to eight plates per day, plus proofs, and each plate was printed more than two hundred times. As the plates wore out, the original plates were again repaired and refurbished to ensure that they could be returned to China for further printing. When the Qianlong emperor demanded that 'one hundred prints must be sent back with the original plates', he seems never to have considered leaving some of the editions in France. In fact, his order was not followed to the letter, and a large number of proofs, remnant sets and a few complete editions still exist in museums, libraries and private collections around the world.

Eventually, 200 copies of each of the 16 copper plates of the War Map were printed and shipped back to China, along with all the original plates. Also recorded in the memorandum on Ko Sheng are the terms of the transfer of printing presses and plate-making equipment and material supplies from Europe to China. Ko-Sheng stated that the Chinese would receive detailed instructions on how to do their own printing, as well as a printing press and all the necessary tools and materials. After the French had completed the production and printing of the war maps, they were transported to China along with the printing press and printing materials.

As a result of the success of the Battle Map of the Ping of the Junbu Hui, the Qing dynasty copied this form and produced six types of copperplate battle maps, such as the Battle Map of the Ping of Jinchuan, the Battle Map of the Ping of Annan, and the Battle Map of the Ping of Taiwan, the content of which is based on the actual record of military actions taken by the Qianlong emperor against the south-western and south-eastern neighbourhoods. They are mainly painted by Chinese painters (with the participation of foreign painters) and printed on copper plates made by the Office of the Interior Affairs of the Qing Dynasty. These six sets of copper plates are truly indigenous to China, reflecting the efforts of Chinese court painters to blend the best of Chinese and Western painting while satisfying the aesthetic interests of the emperor, and are known as a 'hybrid style'. At this time, the Qing court had already introduced advanced European copperplate printing equipment and materials, and the finished prints show that Chinese printmakers had basically mastered the techniques and printing processes of copperplate printmaking. The production of copperplate prints at the Qing court entered a period of prosperity.

What exactly was the French printmaking technique used in the production of the War Map of the Pingxing Junbu Hui? Were the copperplate war maps produced at the Qing court consistent in their technique? These two questions have not yet been answered with certainty by Chinese and foreign scholars.

In the 18th century in Europe, copper engravings were the mainstay of the printing industry and the art of printmaking at the time, with engraving and etching being the two most common production techniques. Engraving "The engraving method is derived from metal engraving and relies on the hard work of carving with a single knife, which is time-consuming and requires years of practice to master and has a high technical threshold. The etching method" uses the principle of acid to corrode the

metal by gently scratching the surface of a copper plate coated with an anti-corrosion solution, exposing the metal layer, and then using the acid to corrode the lines. It is relatively simple to produce and easy to master. In contrast, the engraved lines are more delicate and rigid, due to the different production processes, while the etched lines are more flexible and vivid, and in the 18th century it was generally accepted that the engraved lines were more expressive than the etched lines. Different printmakers would choose different production techniques depending on their printing needs, with some focusing on one technique and others combining the strengths of both. For example, the famous 18th-century English printmaker William Hogarth's masterpiece copperplate grouping, *The Career of the Prodigal Son*, is a perfect combination of engraving and etching. The French engraving of *The War Picture of the Pingding of the Quasi-Bu Hui* was produced in the 1860s and 1870s, at a time when most European copper engravings were based on the engraving technique. Based on the analysis of the original printing steps of the war map in the Louvre collection, I also believe that the French engraving of the war map uses a combination of engraving and etching. The inference is as follows: firstly, the engraver used the etching method, in which the image of the drawing was



Fig. 4 "The chief of Ush surrendering to the city" in the Musée du Louvre, France, from the battle map of the pacification of the Zhumbe Hui

After transferring to the surface of the preservative-coated copper plate, the overall form and basic layers of the image were etched and etched with the etching method. Details are then drawn on the test print and the heaviest darker and lighter transitional parts of the image are engraved using the engraving technique (Fig. 4), and the etching is continued to complete the lightest and most delicate layers of the image, such as the sky part of the background. These two techniques can be repeated alternately, with appropriate scratching done in the process to remove the excess. After a long and laborious plate making process, the image is made complete and uniform, and finally, after repeated test prints and modifications, it is officially printed. The advantage of combining the two techniques of etching and engraving is that the flexibility and slenderness of the etched lines are brought into play, while the rigour and three-dimensionality of the engraved lines are also highlighted. At the same time, the production cycle is considerably shortened and the workload of the engraver is reduced.

So what techniques were used in the six sets of war maps subsequently produced by the Qing House?

In June 2019, the author saw the original "War Map of Pingding Taiwan" and judged that the map was similar to

The techniques used in the production of the Thirty-six Views of the Summer Palace Poems are the same, both being etched. The analysis is as follows: firstly, the texture of the lines belongs to the etched rather than the engraved lines. Secondly, Ma Guoxian clearly records in his memoirs the fact about the use of substitutes for the manufacture of nitric acid for the etching of copper plates. It can

be proved that the technique used for the Thirty-six Views of the Summer Palace poem is line etching. Among the copperplate techniques, the etching method is relatively simple, and the engraving method is a specialised skill that only a professional engraver might possess. Ma Guoxian himself was not an expert in copper engraving, and he only knew a little of the principles, so we can infer that the technique Ma mastered was only line etching. Thirdly, Ma Guoxian trained the first Chinese at the court in the art of copper engraving, so it is tentatively assumed that the Chinese engravers at the Qing court also mastered the line etching method. Fourth, there is no documented record of foreign engravers coming to China at this time to train Chinese in the engraving method. The missionary at the court, Jiang Youren, even with his extensive knowledge of copperplate production, was not a professional engraver, so it is unlikely that any missionaries were teaching the Chinese engraving method at the Qing court. In summary, according to

The available sources judge that the seven sets of war maps from the Qing House, including all other copperplate prints produced at the Qing court, were done using a single etching technique. This is a judgement based on historical documentation and viewing the original print.

If we compare the characteristics of the grooves engraved in the original copper plate, we can conclude more conclusively the technique used in each of them. The engraving method uses a special push-knife tool with a diamond-shaped blade, which, when pushed smoothly with the tip of the blade against the surface of the plate, picks out the lines with the diamond-shaped blade, leaving a V-shaped groove in the plate. The more parallel the tip of the blade is to the surface of the plate, the easier and shallower the line will be; the greater the angle between the tip and the plate, the deeper the line will be and the more difficult it will be to push. In the collection of the Folk Museum in Berlin, Germany, there are 34 original copper plates, including the "Pingding Junbu Hui" and seven other battle maps. In one of the original copper plates, the V-shaped grooves in the collar area and the darker part of the face can be clearly seen as traces of the engraving method. The lines of the etching method, as they were cut through the preservative layer with a carving needle and etched with acid to expose the metal, do not corrode vertically downwards, but enter the metal layer and spread in all directions, thus creating a U-shaped groove with a small mouth and a large belly. As can be seen partially in an original copper plate of the Battle of Pingding Miao, despite the thick and deep lines of the figures, the grooves are curved and the interior has a light green patina as a result of the residual acid. This essentially confirms that the lines have been etched by the etching method. A more accurate conclusion can only be drawn by comparison with the original copper plate in situ.

Although the singularity of the production technique somewhat limited the number of Qing house engravings

The standard of production of copperplate war maps in China. However, the exquisite quality of the war map, the advanced printing standards and the century-long history of copperplate production in China not only renewed the Chinese's love for Western copperplates, but also directly inspired the Chinese to produce and publish their own copperplates. After the original version of The Two Victories of Pingding Jun Hui was returned to China, by order of the Qianlong Emperor, Jiang Youren (**Benoist Michel**)

The picture of the victory of the two sections of the Pingding Jun Hui, inscribed with a poem by the Qianlong emperor, was reprinted.^[16] Jiang Youren, a French missionary to China in 1744, was not only an outstanding architect and artist, but also a scientist with a solid knowledge of Western technology and a good understanding of copperplate production and printing. The Chinese printmakers at the court had the opportunity to witness the whole process of copperplate production and printing, and at the same time had a teacher who could show them the ropes when making their own copperplates. In contrast to the French version, the Qing court printed on thin Chinese paper with vegetable fibres rather than French printmaking paper. This thin paper does not bring out the lines and details of the copperplate very well. It may have appeared amateurish to the French, but apparently the emperor was not very concerned about it.

With the guidance of professionals and the availability of a full range of copperplate production equipment and materials, the level of production and printing of copperplate prints at the Qing court naturally continued to improve. The most representative of the standard of copperplate production at the Qing court is the Yuanmingyuan Changchun Garden. This is the only set of copperplate prints printed during the Qianlong period with non-military themes, depicting the various facades of several buildings in the Western Wing of the Yuanmingyuan from different angles, such as the Harmony of Curiosities, Haiyan Hall, Yuan Ying Guan and the Great Water Law. It is the only set of copper engravings printed during the Qianlong period that are not on military subjects. The album contains a letter of 20 plates, all printed on paper made in Hangzhou, and according to archival records the set was drafted in 1781 and completed in 1786. The production and publication of the copper plates of the Yuanmingyuan group was finally a success, thanks to the combined efforts of a number of Chinese court painters and craftsmen known as 'Lang Shining's pupils'.^[17] The Manchu painter Ilan Tai, who served at the court, was responsible for the drawing, and the anonymous court copperplate engraver completed the engraving. The prints are etched with 'extreme precision' in detail. The architectural landscape, details and proportions of the various parts of the building are clear and precise, and the rule of focal perspective is successfully applied. Some scholars have speculated that this grouping is not a sketch of the landscape, but rather an enrichment and three-dimensionalisation of the content of the architectural drawings. In fact, as a student of Lang Shining, Iolanthe was already involved in court painting with him in the 14th year of the Qianlong reign. In the eyes of the Qianlong emperor, Iolanthe would have been the best Chinese painter to master the methods of perspective and European painting techniques after Wang Youxue.^[18] He not only painted through-views in the Forbidden City, but also painted a large number of them for the Yuanmingyuan. It is therefore possible to assume that Iolanthe applied the perspective technique of the 'general view line painting' to the copperplate sketches of the Yuanmingyuan. The trees and the sky

in this set are not realistic, but are added to the scene with subjective interest, creating a geometric, patterned and stylised interest. The composition is different from that of Western copper engravings, and avoids the rigidity and vulgarity of the large poetic inscriptions by the emperor in the war pictures. This is one of the very few works in the Qing dynasty that perfectly combines copperplate techniques with artistry, marking a mature stage in the production of copperplates in the Qing dynasty in terms of engraving, printing and material equipment.

IV

In the late Qianlong period, the influence of Western painting methods waned due to the ban on Western missionaries coming to China, and copperplate engraving at the Qing court began to decline in the period just after its rise. During the Jiaqing dynasty, the court copperplate engravings were far inferior to those of the previous dynasties, a turning point in the decline of court copperplate engravings during the Qing dynasty. The engraving of the "Pingding Huijiang Battle Map" during the Daoguang period was crude, rigid and of a much lower standard than before. With the decline of national power, the new war maps drawn up by the Imperial Household during the Xianfeng Dynasty (1851-1862) could no longer afford to be made into copper plates. The history of copperplate engraving at the Qing court came to an abrupt end.

Throughout history, the Western missionaries to China played a key role in the spread of copper engravings during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and in the process of their taking root, development, prosperity and decline at the Qing court. From Ricci's introduction of copperplate as a medium of religious propaganda and edification to the Chinese

The first copper engravings were made at the Qing court by Ma Guoxian, then by Lang Shining, who facilitated an 'international collaboration' between Chinese and French court artists, and finally by Jiang Youren, who oversaw the 'localisation' of copper engravings. More than just a printing medium and printmaking art, the Qing court copperplate is naturally informed by the early cultural and political exchanges between China and the West, and has both historical documentation and artistic research value. Unlike the way copperplate existed in Europe as a familiar medium of communication, the rulers of the Qing dynasty valued its exquisite artistic effects and its unique value in spreading cultural and political information. It was kept as a royal art treasure within the walls of the Qing court for the enjoyment of the imperial family and nobility. The royal dependency of copperplate prints naturally shared the fate of the Qing dynasty. This may provide some insight: an art form can only remain viable if it is involved in a wide range of social life to play an aesthetic and communicative role, and if it has the ability to respond to the needs and collisions of multiple cultures. □

Notes.

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