Helen Glaister

The Picturesque in Peking

European Decoration at the Qing Court

This case study of the political agency of European style art objects at the eighteenth-century Chinese court begins with a small, finely enameled porcelain flask; a Chinese object that entered the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London in 1951 as part of the Basil Ionides Bequest of Chinese export porcelain (**figs. 1a, 1b**). Just like other articles in the bequest, the flask is decorated in European style—a common feature of Chinese porcelain manufactured to the specifications of wealthy Europeans as part of the lucrative private trade in goods from Asia¹—with idyllic scenes of young European women and children. The manner of their depiction, paying careful attention to light and shade through the folds of their clothing and flesh tones on their bare arms and neck, and attempts toward spatial recession all conform to established and recognizable European painting conventions. However, on further examination, all is not as it might seem: the rocks seen here more closely resemble those depicted in traditional Chinese brush painting and the principal figures are staged against a blank white canvas and sit precariously close to the pictorial space—the curvature of the flask accentuates the visual allusion, like the lens of an eyeglass or optical device. Furthermore, how are these scenes framed? The decorative border pattern is unfamiliar and difficult to decode: is it too made of porcelain or some other rare material? In the shape of the vessel, we are finally on firmer ground. Flasks of this form had been popular in China for centuries, and as such this was a well-established point of reference, denoting cultural continuity and allusions to the “antique” in Qing dynasty China (1644–1911) when this object was made. The shape of this vessel therefore suggests a Chinese recipient rather than a European one.

Since its first arrival at the museum, the reassessment of this object by later Chinese ceramic scholars has now placed it firmly in the field of eighteenth-century Chinese court arts, evidence of which will be provided over the following pages. Over that same period, the terms “europeenerie” (first coined by collector and curator of

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¹ Private trade lay outside the bulk trade in commodities conducted on behalf of the East India Companies. As such, designs tended to be personalized, more skilfully produced, and significantly more expensive. For more on the distinction between private and company trade, see Luisa E. Mengoni, “The Sino-European Trade in Ceramics: Bulk Export and Special Orders,” in *Passion for Porcelain: Masterpieces of Ceramics from the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum* (National Museum of China International Exchange, 2012). Anthony Farrington, *Trading Places: The East India Company and Asia 1600–1834* (London: British Library, 2002).

Fig. 1a, 1b: Flask, porcelain decorated with enamels, Qianlong period (1736–95), 10.2 × 8.9 cm, Basil Ionides Bequest, V&A: C.50-1951.

Chinese art, George N. Kates in 1952)² and later “euroiserie” (preferred by art historian Jonathan Hay from 1995 and used herein)³ have been employed by scholars in the field to refer to the court fashion in China for European design and the visual arts.⁴ Both terms suggest a Chinese response to European art and design in a similar manner or equivalence to that widely known in the West as “chinoiserie”, first discussed in English in 1883⁵ and the subject of numerous academic studies since Hugh Honour’s monograph of 1961.⁶ More recently, eighteenth-century specialist Stacey Sloboda provided a critical reassessment of chinoiserie that stressed the visual and semiotic significance of Chinese art objects as articles of commerce, which extended the reach of Chinese material and visual culture across social boundaries of class, gender, or political allegiances.⁷ The seemingly unstoppable outpouring of objects from China to Europe in the early modern period, in particular silk, lacquer, and porcelain, was unmatched in China, where European articles were in comparison small in number and scarcely seen beyond the port cities or the court.⁸

In this article, I will argue that the primary differences that separate the concepts of chinoiserie and euroiserie are temporal and spatial. While chinoiserie is most closely associated with the long eighteenth century, its impact was felt over the centuries that followed, during which time Chinese products and their designs have become ubiquitous, making a permanent impression on European material culture up to the present. In contrast, euroiserie is largely unknown beyond specialist academic circles and was largely restricted to a small ruling elite, making little impact beyond those confines. This article will question why euroiserie appealed to the

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2 The American George N. Kates gained rare access to the palace buildings while living in a traditional Chinese house within the Old Imperial City in Beijing from 1933–40. See George N. Kates, “Prince Kung’s Palace and Its Adjoining Garden,” *Monumenta Serica* 5 (1940). George N. Kates, *The Years That Were Fat Peking 1933–1940* (Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952).

3 Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion, 2010).

4 Other scholars prefer the terms “occidentalism” and “europerie.” See Kristina Kleutghen, “Chinese Occidenterie: The Diversity of ‘Western’ Objects in Eighteenth-Century China,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 47, no. 2 (Winter 2014): 117–35. Ching-Ling Wang, “Chinoiserie in Reflection: European Objects and Their Impact on Chinese Art of the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Wechselblicke: Zwischen China und Europa 1669–1907* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2017), 42–55.

5 The term first appeared in English in *Harper’s Magazine*, 1883. See David Beevers, ed., *Chinese Whispers: Chinoiserie in Britain, 1650–1930* (Brighton: Royal Pavilion & Museums, 2008), 13.

6 Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (London: John Murray, 1961).

7 Stacey Sloboda, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Studies in Design (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

8 While Beijing and Guangzhou (Canton) remained the principal sites for the manufacture and consumption of European style Chinese art objects throughout the eighteenth century, Kristina Kleutghen reminds us that localized examples of “occidenterie,” in this case Suzhou woodblock prints of the 1730s and 1740s, were produced for the prosperous residents of the Jiangnan region. Kleutghen, “Chinese Occidenterie,” 128–31.

ruling Manchu emperors, in particular Qianlong (r. 1736–95), who enthusiastically commissioned paintings, architecture, and decorative art objects in this and other “non-Chinese” styles? What can this tell us about Manchu notions of statecraft and how has this been understood in later periods?

This article will consider three key factors that gave rise to *euroiserie* at the Chinese court; transmission, consumption and circulation. The methods of artistic transfer, from Europe to China, will focus on the movement of objects, materials and skilled practitioners not only to the court in Beijing, but also to the manufacturing heartlands of Jingdezhen and Guangzhou (Canton), more commonly associated with mass-produced articles for domestic and export markets. The circulation of objects from the periphery of China to its symbolic center at the court in Beijing will highlight the multiple channels through which European visual and decorative arts were experienced and encountered in China, stimulating and facilitating the production of *euroiserie* objects for court consumption.

Transmission: Technological Exchange

The origins of eighteenth-century opaque enamel colors, as seen on the V&A flask and which the Chinese called *falangcai* or “foreign colors,” can be traced to the arrival of European glass and enamels on metal that were gifted to the Chinese court through diplomatic and papal missions throughout the seventeenth century.⁹ From around 1680, the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1662–1722) reestablished imperially sponsored porcelain production at the industrial kilns of Jingdezhen in southeast China, simultaneously creating specialist workshops in close proximity to the imperial living quarters in Beijing, where he could directly intervene in the production of objects for court consumption.¹⁰ A notorious technophile, Kangxi not only supported the production of traditional crafts such as jade working and cloisonné, but actively encouraged experimentation with new technologies and the reinvestigation of materials previously considered of minor status, such as glass, according to traditional Chinese value systems.

The production of glass in the Imperial Glass Workshop, established in 1696 under the German Jesuit, Kilian Stumpf (1655–1720), introduced European methods

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⁹ Emily Byrne Curtis, *Glass Exchange between Europe and China, 1550–1800: Diplomatic, Mercantile and Technological Interactions*, Transculturalisms, 1400–1700 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). Eugenio Menegon, ‘Amicitia Palatina: The Jesuits and the Politics of Gift-Giving at the Qing Court’, ed. Magda Abbiati and Federico Greselin, *Sinica Venetiana* 1 (2014), https://www.academia.edu/22901277/_Amicitia_Palatina_The_Jesuits_and_the_Politics_of_Gift-Giving_at_the_Qing_Court_2014_.

¹⁰ Emily Byrne Curtis, ‘European Contributions to the Chinese Glass of the Early Qing Period’, *Journal of Glass Studies* 35 (1993): 91–101.

of glassmaking hitherto unknown in China.¹¹ The manufacture of glass in China had been largely relegated to the realm of imitation; pale green glass had been substituted for precious jade since at least the Han dynasty (221 BC–AD 220), but the aesthetic potential of this material had never been fully explored. The range of colors, in particular ruby red glass, and decorative effects made possible through the use of materials sent directly from Europe and implemented by Jesuit practitioners schooled in glass-making techniques prior to their mission to China, presented to the Chinese a host of new material possibilities. As Father d'Entrecolles later recalled, "They are almost as curious in China about the glass and crystal that comes from Europe, as people in Europe are curious about porcelain from China."¹²

The role of European Jesuits in the production of court arts is now well-known, through the extensive literature they generated¹³ and more recently through increased access to the imperial archives in Beijing and Taipei.¹⁴ Since the 1980s, improved access to archival documents in the Manchu language, the ancestral language of the Qing rulers, has further enhanced understanding of this period, generating a significant body of secondary material.¹⁵ While a select number of Jesuits gained remarkably close access to the emperor and the inner court, it is clear that even these individuals were valued principally as conduits through which the Manchu rulers could learn about Western science, mathematics, and astrology, and for their practical

11 Emily Byrne Curtis et al., eds., *Pure Brightness Shines Everywhere: The Glass of China* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, Vt: Ashgate, 2004).

12 The long and detailed letters of Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles (1664–1741), written in 1712 and 1722, provide key historical accounts of the porcelain industry in Jingdezhen. They have been translated from the French and published in full numerous times. See Robert Tichane, *Ching-Te-Chen: Views of a Porcelain City*, Rev. ed (Painted Post, N.Y: New York State Institute for Glaze Research, 1983).

13 The archives of ARSI (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome), APF (Archivo Propaganda Fide, Rome) and ASV (Archivo Segreto Vaticano, Vatican City) today provide an extensive resource for scholars in this field. On glass and enamels, see Emily Byrne Curtis, 'Notes on Qing Glassmaking: D'Incarville's "Catalogue Alphabetique"', *Journal of Glass Studies* 39 (1997): 69–81. Marco Musillo, 'Reconciling Two Careers: The Jesuit Memoir of Giuseppe Castiglione Lay Brother and Qing Imperial Painter', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 1 (2008): 45–59.

14 The archives of the 內務府活計檔 (Imperial household records)、故宮博物院藏清宮陳設檔 (Imperial furnishing archive)、唐英督陶文檔 (Documents about Qing Dynasty Ceramics) are particularly relevant to the study of imperial enamels and have formed the basis of primary research from leading Taiwanese scholars, Liao Pao Show and Shih Ching Fei cited later in this article. For a comparative study of imperial archival research, see Jieh Hsiang et al., 'Discovering Relationships from Imperial Court Documents of Qing China', *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing* 6, no. 1–2 (16 February 2012): 22–41, <https://doi.org/10.3366/ijhac.2012.0036>.

15 See Evelyn S. Rawski, 'Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period', *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (November 1996). Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History*, 1st ed (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1999).

skills in the arts of European glassmaking, enameling, and painting.¹⁶ Scholars have noted the intensive training missionaries underwent prior to their arrival and upon the direct request of the emperor. In the arts of glassmaking, first Kilian Stumpf was schooled in Germany and later Gabriel-Leonard de Brossard (1703–1758) and Pierre d’Incarville (1706–1757) at Rouen, France, arriving in Beijing in 1740.¹⁷ The enamel master Jean-Baptiste Gravereau (1690–1762) worked for three years at court before his early return to France due to ill health; his replacement, Niccolò Tomacelli, had no such experience but on the command of the emperor swiftly became expert in that medium. Concurrently, materials for the manufacture of glass and enamel were brought over from Europe to supplement glass production until locally sourced materials were found. Local Chinese craftsmen trained in the European arts subsequently maintained self-reliant workshops that could operate independently of their Jesuit supervisors.¹⁸

The Kangxi emperor took an active interest in the development of these new technologies. As cultural historian Emily Byrne Curtis notes, “The Yangxin Palace was the place where the Kangxi emperor worked early in the morning and later in the evening. It was his custom to have brought there, every two days, the glass and enamel wares made by his order, he proudly compared his glassware with European examples.”¹⁹ The interaction between the state sponsored imperial ateliers in Beijing, in particular those specializing in cloisonné, enamels, and glass, was essential to the discovery and circulation of new technologies that would shape the artistic and decorative repertoire of eighteenth-century court arts.

The Qianlong emperor, who concerns us most directly here, closely followed the example of his grandfather and energetically supported the manufacture of objects noted for their originality, novelty, exoticism, and ingenuity—defined in Chinese as *qi* 奇.²⁰ On his command, the Jesuits in his service worked on the most prestigious architectural and pictorial projects, including conspicuously public commissions recording state events and military successes, notably the campaigns against the Zunghar in the Western regions that finally came to end in 1755. In this instance, the Qianlong emperor immortalized his victories in several ways, including commissioning the Jesuit painters to sketch a series of sixteen preliminary drawings from which Chinese court painters could produce finished works.²¹ In 1765, these same drawings

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16 On the relationship between Jesuits at the courts of the Qing Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, see Lauren Arnold, ‘Of the Mind and the Eye: Jesuit Artists in the Forbidden City in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, *Pacific Rim Report* 27 (2003): 2–9.

17 Curtis, ‘Notes on Qing Glassmaking’.

18 Curtis, ‘European Contributions to the Chinese Glass of the Early Qing Period’.

19 Curtis.

20 See *Sensuous Surfaces*, 25

21 The Jesuit painters Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), Jean-Denis Attiret (1702–1768), Ignaz Sichelbarth (1708–1780), and a missionary of the Propaganda, the Italian Giovanni Damasceno Salutti

were sent to France, where Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715–1790) supervised the production of copperplate engravings from which 200 prints were made and shipped back to Beijing in 1774, whereupon further prints were made and distributed throughout the empire. The woodblock print format has an ancient precedent in China, but the choice of European copperplate engravings for the dissemination of state achievements denoted the Chinese engagement with new technology and an internationally recognizable visual language.²² The circulation of European prints provided a valuable visual impetus to the decoration of Chinese art objects, not only for items tailored to European taste and designed for export, some of which also circulated in the domestic market,²³ but luxuries for court use such as the V&A flask, which will be returned to later in this article.

Materializing Europe: Imperial Patronage and Consumption

Perhaps the most remarkable physical manifestation of eighteenth-century euroiserie were the European Pavilions in the Garden of Perfect Clarity (Yuanmingyuan), designed for the Qianlong emperor under the direction of Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), with the assistance of specialist Jesuit artist-craftsmen and their unnamed Chinese counterparts. Built between 1747 and 1770, the original appearance of the buildings is today glimpsed through a series of copper-plate prints commissioned by the emperor in 1783–86, the European print medium once more chosen to record the twenty views of the flamboyant buildings and gardens (**fig. 2**). No longer extant, since its notorious destruction by British and French troops in 1860, all that remains of the physical space are architectural remains and fragments, such as the glazed stoneware ornament in the V&A collection (**fig. 3**).²⁴ In the form of a shell, this object typifies the rococo preference for curvilinear decoration and natural forms and probably con-

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(d. 1781) all worked on this project. Evelyn S. Rawski, 'Territories of the Qing', in *China: The Three Emperors* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), 154–76.

²² Conversely, the early missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), who arrived in China around 1600, translated traditional European Christian images into more visually recognizable Chinese forms. See Arnold, "Of the Mind and the Eye: Jesuit Artists in the Forbidden City in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," 3.

²³ Recent research has demonstrated that recognizable images of the Thirteen Factories in Guangzhou circulated both in the export and domestic markets. See Kleutghen, "Chinese Occidenterie," 125–27.

²⁴ For a full discussion of the history of "Summer Palace" objects in the West, see Louise Tythacott, *Collecting and Displaying China's "Summer Palace" in the West: The Yuanmingyuan in Britain and France* (Routledge, 2017).

Fig. 2: West façade of the Pavilion of Calm Seas (Haiyan Tang Ximian), copperplate engraving on paper, designed by Yi, Lantai, 9 of 19, from original set of 20, 1783–86, made in Beijing. V&A: 29452:9 Acquired in 1883 from E. Parsons.

Fig. 3: Architectural fitting, stoneware with turquoise glaze, made in China, 1747–70. 34.5 × 38 × 23 cm. V&A: C.382-1912.

stituted part of the roof of one of the European-style palace buildings.²⁵ According to surviving textual records, the European Pavilions were bedecked with a concoction of European-style novelties—many gifted objects such as tapestries,²⁶ clocks, and automata²⁷ were stored here alongside items manufactured with the assistance of European technologies and expertise in the imperial workshops of Beijing and as tribute from the coastal port of Guangzhou (Canton), discussed below. The accumulation of these objects under a single Manchu roof offer insights into the self-image of the emperor,²⁸ who was actively engaged in the production and consumption of imperial artwork and in turn the construction of multiple imperial identities, bringing the nations of Europe within the Chinese orbit.

In addition to large architectural projects, Jesuit court artists designed and decorated some of the most private imperial spaces,²⁹ such as the Qianlong emperor's intimate Juanqinzhai ("Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service") in his private apartments of the Forbidden City,³⁰ as well as precious objects for the emperor's personal contemplation. Laura Hostetler, a historian specializing in colonial contacts between the Qing empire and non-Chinese people, argues that the political neutrality of the European Jesuits may have appealed to the Manchu ruling minority, whose relationship with the Han Chinese majority was complex.³¹ However, this view is countered by Qing historian, Joanna Waley-Cohen, who cites notable exceptions when Jesuits became actively engaged in diplomatic or commercial incidents, suggesting a degree of political and economic engagement at an individual level.³² There is little doubt that leading Jesuit painters such as Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), known in China as Lang Shining, enjoyed a lasting relationship with the ruling elite over his 50 years in service. Despite the elevated status he enjoyed, Lauren Arnold, scholar of

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²⁵ Purchased by C. H. Wylde in China in 1912. Wylde was the Keeper of Ceramics and the first member of V&A staff to visit East Asia.

²⁶ French tapestries, made by the Beauvais manufactory to the chinoiserie designs of François Boucher in the 1740s and presented to the Emperor in 1765, were still hanging in the palace buildings when British and French troops arrived in 1860. See Kristel Smentek, 'Chinoiseries for the Qing: A French Gift of Tapestries to the Qianlong Emperor', *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 1 (2016): 87–109.

²⁷ Catherine Pagani, *Eastern Magnificence & European Ingenuity: Clocks of Late Imperial China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

²⁸ For a recent reassessment of the imperial collection of the Qianlong Emperor, See Nicole T.C. Chiang, *Emperor Qianlong's Hidden Treasures: Reconsidering the Collection of the Qing Imperial Household* (S.l.: Hong Kong University Press, 2019).

²⁹ See Kristina Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces*, Art History Publication Initiative (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015).

³⁰ See Nancy Berliner, 'Juanqinzhai Revisited', *Orientalism* 39, no. 5 (2008): 31–40.

³¹ Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

³² Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing*, 96.

Chinese Jesuit studies, records the tensions which rapidly surfaced if Jesuit behavior strayed beyond that proscribed by their rulers.³³

By the reign of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1795), technological advances and the exchange of knowledge between the imperial workshops had created a new palette of enamel colors that were used interchangeably on metal, porcelain, and glass. The most radical discovery was that of white, yellow, and pink which radically extended the spectrum of colors and artistic possibilities available to decorators working in this medium. The introduction of opaque white allowed shading and the gradation of color as never before, and was employed by artists trained in Western painting techniques to add depth and volume to decorative surfaces.³⁴ Concurrently, the opacity of the new enamels created dazzling colors that introduced texture to porcelain and metalwork more akin to brocade than the smooth, glassy surface of porcelain. Known as “flower on brocade” (*jin shang tian hua*),³⁵ an incised carving technique was used to apply detailed patterns into the enameled surface, utilizing European glass-cutting techniques and replicating patterns and motifs found in carved Chinese lacquer, further expanding and transmitting the decorative repertoire across diverse media.³⁶ The two effects were often used in tandem, producing surprising combinations of pictorial scenes observed through blazing borders of dense ornamentation.³⁷ The extent to which these colors were a Chinese or foreign invention continues to provoke debate among ceramic scholars and requires further research; the composition of yellow and white enamels remained close to preexisting Chinese cloisonné technology, which had been produced at court workshops in Beijing since the early fifteenth century.³⁸

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33 Arnold cites two examples when Castiglione appealed directly to the Qianlong Emperor on behalf of his fellow Jesuits, begging for imperial intervention to prevent the persecution of missionaries in Fujian Province, South China. The first plea in 1736 was successful, but in 1746 the emperor proclaimed, “Hua-ba,” or “Paint – Get on with your painting!” Arnold, “Of the Mind and the Eye,” 7.

34 Chinese sources confirm the use of Western style techniques at the imperial kilns at Jindgezhen during the Qianlong reign. Zhu Yan recorded the observations of imperial kiln supervisor, Tang Ying (1682–1756), in his encyclopedic work “Tao Shuo” of 1774, later translated by British doctor Stephen Bushell while based in Beijing. See Zhu Yan and Stephen W. Bushell, trans., *Description of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain: Being a Translation of the T'ao Shuo* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1910).

35 See Pao Show Liao, “From Flower-on-Brocade to Yang t'sai,” *National Palace Museum Monthly* 280 (July 2006): 4–23.

36 According to the imperial household records, Tang Ying submitted sixty-two pieces of flower on brocade enameled vessels and 5,800 other porcelains from Jindgezhen on November 20, 1742 (7th Year of the Qianlong reign). Qianlong ordered the enamels to be sent to the Qianqing Palace for display, within the Forbidden City, the remainder to the Yuanmingyuan for storage. Liao, “From Flower-on-Brocade,” p. 14.

37 See Gourd-shaped vase with ribbon-shaped ears and designs of Europeans in enamels on yellow ground, Qianlong mark and period (1736–95), Palace Museum, Beijing.

38 The earliest Chinese cloisonné objects identified by reign mark date to the Xuande period (1426–1435) Craig Clunas and Jessica Harrison-Hall, eds., *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China* (London: British Museum), 82–86.

The manufacture and composition of pink enamels owes much to European enameling techniques, utilizing colloidal gold in a similar manner to ruby red glass, introduced by the Jesuits and discussed above.³⁹

European style painted decoration drew principally from the traditions of the French romantic and rococo, copied from enamel originals or prints and paintings which were by then available in China. The juxtaposition of European and Chinese decorative styles is common to these works, deliberately drawing together two disparate traditions to forge a new and innovative visual language. Furthermore, the transfer of artists, European and Chinese, between the arts of painting and calligraphy to the decorated object blurred traditional boundaries that separated notions of “art” and “art object”; the formal classification of arts and craft at court ordinarily placed the painter higher in status to the craftsman or artisan.⁴⁰ While many, although not all, painted works are clearly attributed to individual artists, enameled works on porcelain, glass and copper bear only the imperial reign mark. Art historian Richard Vinograd identifies such objects as “trans-portal,” that is, “portable and transportable objects whose materiality becomes a site of cultural encounter, and which bear pictorial portals that open up to scenes of cultural difference.”⁴¹ This “cultural difference” endowed objects such as the V&A flask with an exotic allure, drawing the viewer into an idealized European world in a similar manner to chinoiserie in Europe. The exclusivity of the object heightened the experience of the European encounter that was the preserve of the emperor and his closest courtiers; in contrast, chinoiserie decoration was widely visible in Europe by that time and familiar at all levels of society.

Pastoral scenes depicting young European women and children were particularly popular, recreating subjects well known in European visual culture but unfamiliar to Chinese eyes.⁴² The theme of a young woman with a caged bird, as seen on the V&A flask, can be widely found in contemporary European paintings and prints and was

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³⁹ For more on glaze technology, see Nigel Wood, *Chinese Glazes* (London: A. & C. Black, 2007), 240–43. Rose Kerr, Nigel Wood, and Joseph Needham, *Chemistry and Chemical Technology. Part 12: Ceramic Technology*, Science and Civilisation in China, 5.12 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004). For a recent discussion of enamels in the collection of the Musée Guimet, Paris, see Philippe Colombar, Yizheng Zhang, and Bing Zhao, ‘Non-Invasive Raman Analyses of Chinese Huafalang and Related Porcelain Wares. Searching for Evidence for Innovative Pigment Technologies’, *Ceramics International* 43, no. 15 (October 2017): 12079–88, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ceramint.2017.06.063>.

⁴⁰ While most specialist craftsmen employed in the imperial workshops remain outside the historical record, notable individuals engaged in the esteemed techniques of carving in bamboo and ivory, such as Shi Tianzhang, were accorded the highest rank. See Craig Clunas et al., eds., *Chinese Carving* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1996), 49.

⁴¹ Richard Vinograd, “Hybrid Spaces of Encounter in the Qing Era,” in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and the West* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 10–28.

⁴² For more on gender, “orientalizing” and representations of women in China, see Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (London: Hurst, 1995).

Fig. 4: Vase, porcelain with enamel decoration, Qianlong mark and period (1736–95), 205 × 103 mm, PDF, A818, Sir Percival David Collection, British Museum.

frequently modelled in Continental porcelain in the middle years of the eighteenth century.⁴³ As the European viewer would know, the birdcage symbolized female virginity, which was intact if the bird remained within the cage, but lost if the bird had escaped, as in this example. On the reverse of the flask, a second figure also holds a bird in her hand and is accompanied by a small child who peers over her shoulder, indicating that she too has succumbed to an earlier sexual encounter. The designs were probably copied from contemporary European print sources, and while the tradition of keeping caged birds has an ancient precedent in China, considered a virtuous hobby for men and a distraction from vice, it is unlikely the symbolic significance expressed by these scenes was understood by the Chinese viewer.

Rare examples in the Sir Percival David Collection, now housed at the British Museum in London, illustrate the experimental use of enamel decoration on porcelain and glass. The decorative border in carmine pink against a lightly shaded green background on a small porcelain bottle is exceptionally unusual; the archaic pattern echoes designs first seen on ancient Chinese bronze or lacquer objects but in this case created in the latest “European” pink, placing the design firmly at the forefront of contemporary fashion (fig. 4). Dark pink enamel of a similar hue can be seen on early European porcelains from the 1720s in Italy⁴⁴ and was widely adopted by porcelain manufactories across Europe for decorative borders or as the sole colorant in a technique known as *camaïeu*.⁴⁵ The same striking monochromatic use of carmine pink can be observed on other rare items in the Palace Museum Collection, and similar decoration *en grisaille* in black and grey enamels was popularized in China from the 1720s, being perfectly suited to the transfer of designs from print to porcelain.

Landscape decoration on enameled porcelain or glass appears less frequently than figural subjects but does survive. A pair of wine cups in the Sir Percival David Collection recreate imagined Sino-European landscapes in miniature—each cup being less than five centimeters in height. (figs. 5, 6) The micro-scale of these objects further emphasizes the high material value of glass and enamels, showcasing the skills of the enamel painters and highlighting the intensely personal nature of these objects. Each piece could only be enjoyed at close quarters—the exclusivity of material, subject, and aesthetic experience characterizing objects reserved for elite and imperial consumption. Border decoration was a further means of extending the artistic repertoire, and here replicates scrolling and floral motifs derived from Venetian glassware, mentioned above. Another design, perhaps originating from the Italian

⁴³ See V&A examples of male and female figures, modeled by Johann Friedrich Luck (1727–1797), manufactured at the Frankenthal Porcelain Factory, ca. 1760, V&A: C.950-1919, C.989-1919.

⁴⁴ At Guiseppe Vezzi's factory in Venice (see BEP Franks cat. 450). Later at the Du Paquier factory, Vienna, Austria (ca. 1735–40, see BEP 1930,0714.1) and at Meissen, Germany (ca. 1735, see BEP Franks cat. 147). All examples from the British Museum collection.

⁴⁵ Camaïeu refers to the monochromatic use of a single color, tonally building up the image.

Figs. 5–6: Pair of glass wine cups, enamel decoration, Qianlong mark and period (1736–95), PDF. 850 and 851, 4.8 and 4.9 cm, Sir Percival David Collection, British Museum.

glasswork technique known as *millefiori*,⁴⁶ or alternatively by its French name *millefleur* or “thousand-flowers” traditionally associated with the naturalistic background decoration of Medieval and Renaissance tapestries, was first seen on porcelain during the Yongzheng period (r. 1723–35). The Chinese interpretation of the European floral theme boldly enveloped the porcelain body and was produced on the grandest scale during the Qianlong reign (r. 1736–95), when the large baluster vase at the Musée

⁴⁶ This technique utilizes colored glass to produce often densely arranged floral roundels which run through the body of the object.

Fig. 7: Vase, porcelain with enameled decoration simulating wood and textiles, Jiajing period (1796–1820), V&A: FE.12-1984.

Guimet was created.⁴⁷ The naturalistic depiction of morning glory, chrysanthemum, hibiscus, peony, daisy, lotus, and lily flowers against a lush green background engulf the entire surface, utilizing the full spectrum of enamel colors available to decorators at that time and demonstrating their exceptional skills and artistry.

A shared fascination with the material world resulted in a distinctive category of objects where optical illusion or *trompe l'oeil* transcended conventional limitations; porcelain imitating wood, glass simulating tortoiseshell, wood in the guise of rhinoceros horn and so on. Techniques first developed by Venetian glassmakers were once more influential in this trend toward optical trickery and novelty—the border on the V&A flask mimics the unusual stone conglomerate, known in the West as “pudding stone.”⁴⁸ The tradition of material versatility was not new in China, as noted earlier, and with the added stimulus of European technologies and visual culture, porcelain and glass became the ideal vehicles for *trompe l'oeil* decoration.

A porcelain vase in the V&A collection (**fig. 7**), produced in the Jiajing period (r. 1796–1820), exhibits the visual characteristics of contrasting materials, first wood—its grain and tonal color interspersed with colorful roundels, asymmetrically arranged in a style reminiscent of Japanese textiles or lacquer but decorated here with pastel polychrome enamels in the Chinese *mille-fleur* design. It is unclear at first sight whether these roundels offer a view through the wooden shell to the floral surface beneath, or whether our vision is foreshortened, placing the roundels in our immediate line of vision. Furthermore, the whole vessel appears to be wrapped around the shoulders with a knotted textile, simultaneously referencing the Chinese practice of tying textile wrappers around vases and jars on special occasions and for use as gifts; a similar design is also found on Japanese lacquer boxes popular in China.⁴⁹ The stylized folds of the cloth suggest volume, which at once is negated by the placement of gilded roundels on its flattened surface. This hybrid object demonstrates the ability of Chinese porcelain decorators to successfully amalgamate multicultural design sources, playfully toying with aspects of perspective, materiality and perception, successfully creating a new design aesthetic rooted in both Eastern and Western traditions. This engagement with non-Chinese artistic traditions, not only from Europe but from other regions of Asia such as Japan, visually asserts the supremacy of the Chinese empire and its ability to deploy “foreign” visual signifiers for its own purpose.

The material fascination and connection between art-making, as technological process and aesthetic act, has been explained by social anthropologist Alfred Gell, in the following terms:

⁴⁷ Porcelain vase, overglaze enameled decoration, Qianlong mark and period (1736–95), H:48cm, Grandidier Bequest, G3444, Musée Guimet, Paris.

⁴⁸ A tripod drum-shaped incense burner simulating pudding stone can also be found in the Palace Museum, GU152591.

⁴⁹ See Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces.*, 225–35.

The enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form. Art, as a separate kind of technical activity, only carries further, through a kind of involution, the enchantment which is immanent in all kinds of technical activity.⁵⁰

This observation can be extended to the discovery and application of new materials in China, such as *falangcai* enamels and European-style glass, to their application in unfamiliar and surprising modes that subverted conventional ways of seeing. While trompe l'oeil painted decoration firmly grew from European roots, the concept of material imitation and illusion had an ancient precedent in China, which was further developed and taken to new artistic and technological heights during the eighteenth century.

Circulating Objects: From Periphery to Center

In addition to European objects received directly in Beijing, alternative networks of production, commerce and tribute drew objects from the periphery to the center of the Chinese cultural sphere. As the principal port of contact between European traders and Chinese manufacturers of porcelain, enamels and glass during the eighteenth century, the southern port city of Guangzhou (Canton) regularly sent items of tribute to the court in Beijing. Skilled practitioners were also sent periodically to serve the court in the production of specialist wares, such as enamels on copper, in which there was regional expertise.⁵¹ The triangular circulation of objects between Beijing, Guangzhou, and the porcelain city of Jingdezhen further promoted the exchange of European designs and innovative methods of manufacture across China, but were still primarily the preserve of the court, limiting their cultural and artistic influence beyond these locations.

A large mallow dish decorated with enamels on copper in the V&A, (**fig. 8**) bears a six-character imperial reign mark of the Qianlong emperor, indicating its production in Guangzhou rather than the Imperial Workshops in Beijing, where four-character reign marks were typical.⁵² The bold arrangement of the pictorial design within the petals of a pink flower is most unusual, suggesting this item was intended for display. The European landscape scene is most certainly copied from a print original,

⁵⁰ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 44.

⁵¹ Regional expertise in other crafts, such as the manufacture of lacquer or bamboo carving, drew craftsmen from other parts of China, such as the Jiangnan region.

⁵² Ching-Fei Shi, '日月光华:清宫画珐琅 Radiant Luminance: The Painted Enamelware of the Qing Imperial Court' [施静菲著]. *Ri Yue Guang Hua: Qing Gong Hua Fa Lang*, 2012, <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/biblio/200659731>.

Fig. 8: Dish, painted enamels on copper, Guangzhou, Qianlong mark and period (1736–95), 36.8 cm, V&A: C.34-1924.

of which there was a steady supply in the commercial hub of Guangzhou.⁵³ This object and others like it suggest that traditional classifications in art historical discourse that separated decorative art objects for export from those manufactured for domestic and imperial consumption were in reality fluid and permeable. As the specialist production center for “Canton Enamels” as they became known in the Britain,⁵⁴ it should come as no surprise that objects were also manufactured for imperial consumption

⁵³ On trade in Guangzhou, see Paul Arthur Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Macao: Instituto Cultural do Governo da R.A.E. de Macau, n.d.). For more on European decoration on Chinese export porcelain, see Ronald W. Fuchs, ‘European Subjects on Chinese Porcelain’, *TOCS* 72 (2008): 35–41. Teresa Canepa, *European Scenes on Chinese Art* (London/Lisbon: Jorge Welsh Books, 2005).

⁵⁴ Margaret Jourdain and R. Soame Jenyns, ‘Painted Canton Enamels on Copper and Gold’, in *Chinese Art* (Oxford, 1980).

here,⁵⁵ utilizing Western print designs brought over by European traders in porcelain and other luxury items.⁵⁶

Visualizing the “Other” in Eighteenth-Century China

Why did euroiserie appear to be so popular during the Qianlong reign and what can this tell us about the Emperor’s self-image? A scroll in the Palace Museum offers visual and textual insights into Manchu attitudes toward foreign nations in the mid-eighteenth century and bears some similarities to European costume prints of a similar period.⁵⁷ Commissioned by the emperor in 1751, the four scrolls depict the nationalities and ethnicities of tribute nations, whose relationship to China is discussed below, including for the first time those from the “Western ocean” (*xi-yang*).⁵⁸ Couples from the Netherlands, Britain, Portugal, and Sweden are depicted in typical costume and differentiated by their social customs described in Chinese and Manchu, in a similar manner to other tribute nations. As Anna Jackson, V&A Keeper of the Asian Department notes, “the representation of the ‘other’ in these scrolls has a highly charged political meaning, as the whole known world succumbs to the Emperor’s controlling gaze.”⁵⁹ The depiction of various ethnicities within the Sinocentric world has a long precedent,⁶⁰ though the individuals here are characterized not as tribute bearers, but for their essentialized national identities. The representation of foreign nations in this manner shines a light on Manchu ideology during the second half of the eighteenth century. Pamela Crossley, scholar of modern Chinese and global history, identifies the formation of “universalist” ideology as the third and final stage in the development

55 Ching-Fei Shih, ‘Imperial “Guang Falang” of the Qianlong Period Manufactured by the Guangdong Maritime Customs’, 美術史研究集刊 36 (2013): 87–184.

56 David Sanctuary Howard and John Ayres, *China for the West: Chinese Porcelain and Other Decorative Arts for Export Illustrated from the Mottahedeh Collection* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1978).

57 Series of French and German costume prints circulated widely throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century. See, Christoph Weigel after Caspar Luyken Christoph Weigel the Elder, *Neu-Eröffnete Welt-Galleria. ..., Nürnberg 1703.*, 1703, 1703, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel <http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/wt-4f-93/start.htm>, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Welt-Galleria_T039.jpg.

58 “Huangqing Zhigongtu (Illustrated Tributaries of the Qing Empire),” Ding Guanpeng and others, handscroll, ink and color on paper, China, 1751–75. Palace Museum Collection.

59 Anna Jackson, “Visual Responses: Depicting Europeans in East Asia,” in Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer, *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500–1800* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2004), 206

60 Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise*.

of Manchu ideology, denoting the acceptance of essentialist identities throughout the empire and an exclusive universal identity for the emperor.⁶¹

The representation of the “other” in these scrolls demonstrates fundamental differences between structures of power in China and in Europe; the tribute system mentioned above has no equivalent in Europe but an ancient history in China, combining aspects of diplomacy and trade relations in order to cement superior/inferior relationships between China and affiliated tribute nations. The presentation of objects showcasing the finest domestic crafts and local products to the imperial court were understood as a reflection of good governance and the stability of the Chinese empire.⁶² The failure of the British Embassy in 1793 lay in its refusal to accept a subservient relationship to China, enacted by Lord Macartney’s famous refusal to kowtow to the emperor. Chinese court records tell us that European manufactures were largely regarded as “curiosities” of little practical value, the Qianlong emperor famously stating, “We have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country’s manufactures.”⁶³ Waley-Cohen suggests this curt dismissive may in fact disguise a genuine unease on behalf of the Chinese toward establishing official diplomatic and trade relations with the British. Until the First Opium War (1839–42), foreign trade between China and Europe was conducted on terms dictated by the Chinese state for the benefit of the state, as profits flowed directly to the imperial purse and was overwhelmingly concerned with exported Chinese products.

Euroiserie and Modernity: Chinese Identity in Post-Imperial China

The artistic legacy of Sino-European contact at the Qing court is clear to see in art objects from later periods. Pictorial decoration of an eighteenth-century euroiserie court style can be observed on a porcelain vase in the Sir Percival David Collection

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⁶¹ The first two stages begin with state-building and identity demarcation in the formative period before the Manchus achieved dynastic power (1616–43), the second; conquest and occupation and the development of “transformationalist” ideology of identity (1644–1750). Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1999), 28. For more on Manchu identity, see Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001).

⁶² David Chan-oong Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (Columbia University Press, 2010). Kang compares the largely successful hierarchical East Asian tribute system with its closest European counterpart, the “Westphalian” system, in doing so, providing an alternative model whereby non-European hegemonies can be understood.

⁶³ Chang Gu Cong Bian (Collected Historical Records) (Beiping, 1930–43). Cited in Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing*, 92.

(fig. 9). While the porcelain body is indeed eighteenth century, it is now believed that the enameled decoration may have been added at a later date, perhaps during the early Republican Period (1912–49), raising questions regarding the agency of this object in the first decades of post-imperial rule. Art historian Shi Ching-Fei notes the remarkable discovery in 1925 of a group of over four hundred enameled porcelain and two hundred enameled metal vessels by the curatorial committee of the Forbidden City, indicating the size of the former imperial collection and value of this material by association.⁶⁴ Only a small number were decorated in “Western” style and it is unclear whether these objects ever served as models for porcelain decorators working by that time in Jingdezhen, the imperial workshops in Beijing having ceased production by the late Qianlong period (1789). Other European-inspired motifs and decorative techniques such as *mille-fleur* mentioned above or the monochromatic decoration *en grisaille*, also enjoyed a revival under the new Republic,⁶⁵ offering insights into the formation of new identities in post-imperial China.

Unlike the eighteenth-century examples discussed above, designs during the Republican Period were often based on traditional Chinese subject matter; the auspicious motif of the shepherd and his three sheep seen here, is native to China, a visual pun, “*san yang kai tai*,” meaning “the male force in the universe.” The realization of this theme in European-style may recall the High Qing, a period then widely regarded as the pinnacle of artistic dynastic production and still highly esteemed today. Beyond the field of the arts, the late eighteenth century was long regarded as the political, economic, and cultural highpoint from which China rapidly descended throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in the humiliating collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, compounded by the aggressive insurgences of Western powers. The relationship between China and Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century, when it is possible this object was decorated, cannot be fully explored here, but was entangled with notions of modernity and Chinese self-image. Although anti-Western sentiments remained strong, the association between Western art and modernity were undeniable and deeply rooted. It is perhaps for this reason that the Republicans sought to create their own brand of *euroiserie* decoration during these years, which asserted a positive reassessment of the traditional Chinese past in an internationally recognizable visual style.

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⁶⁴ This group of objects passed in 1950 to the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Shi Ching-fei cites the publication of Qing Court inventories (*Cheshe dang* 陳設 檔 – dated 1835, 1875, and 1902), which confirm the storage of court enamels along with other precious objects in the Qianqing Palace during the late Qing period. Ching-Fei Shih, “A Record of the Establishment of a New Art Form: The Unique Collection of ‘Painted Enamels’ at the Qing Court,” *Collections and Concepts 7* (2003), Heidelberg University Library, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.11588/heidok.00005705>.

⁶⁵ Important developments in porcelain production were made during the Republican Period, despite political turmoil which significantly impacted porcelain production. Simon Kwan, *Chinese Porcelain of the Republic Period*, The Muwan Tang Collection Series (關善明 2008).

Fig. 9: Vase, porcelain decorated with enamels, body Qianlong period (1736–95), enamels possibly Republican period, ca.1912–23, H:31.4cm, PDF.881.

In May 2017, the Kulangsu Gallery of Foreign Artefacts from the Palace Museum Collection opened in the port city of Xiamen (Amoy), one of the Treaty Ports established following the First Opium War (1839–42). The museum showcases the imperial collection of “International Art,” much of European origin, displayed for the first time to the public. Here, French porcelain can be seen boxed in a similar manner to their Chinese counterparts in the Qing imperial treasury, indicating the high value this material commanded on arrival in China.⁶⁶ The creation of this museum, specially dedicated to “foreign artefacts,” has both an important cultural and political message. As China has regained its global influence in recent years, the potency of art and art objects as agents of cultural and political force has once more gained currency. The display of these European objects, once received as diplomatic gifts and perhaps housed in the Yuanmingyuan, reinforces the internationalist agenda of the Chinese state. Objects have been curated and arranged to be seen by a predominantly Chinese visiting public, shedding light on a little-known aspect of Chinese imperial collecting, simultaneously asserting the cultural supremacy of the recent Chinese past and possibilities for the Chinese present.

Conclusion

From the detailed study of Chinese art objects of porcelain, enamel, and glass, this article has shown how European pictorial art, representation, and surface decoration were blended by producers in China with recognizably Chinese decoration, shape, and form, giving way to a new aesthetic now known as “euroiserie.” In contrast to chinoiserie in Europe, which enjoyed wide and lasting popularity, this Chinese fashion occupied a rarified position at court at a particular moment in time, being favored by the Manchu emperors and their circle, in particular during the Qianlong reign in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The identification of euroiserie with the ruling Manchu house demonstrates the manner whereby art, architecture, and art objects carried political messages upon their surfaces and within their form; the prevalence of non-Chinese decoration, be that European, Japanese or frequently Tibetan in the arts of this period made visible the universalist ambitions of the Manchu emperors who were themselves not native to China. Chinese euroiserie was therefore just one aspect of the complex construction of the Manchu self-image, which situated all known nations within the Sinocentric sphere.

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⁶⁶ According to the archives of the imperial workshops, cedar wood boxes were produced from the third year of the Qianlong reign to house enameled wares. Qianlong Zaobanchu archives, Box. No.76, p. 369, quoted from Shih, “A Record of the Establishment of a New Art Form,” 2.

Across the vast territories of China, objects were drawn from the periphery to the center; this included goods manufactured in the southern port of Guangzhou, the primary point of contact between European traders and state appointed Chinese officials. It is now known that objects decorated in *euroiserie* style were also manufactured for court consumption here, in close proximity to those destined for the export markets of Europe and the New World. Further research is required in this field, but it is likely that design sources passed between manufacturers, helping to explain the initial misidentification of the V&A flask. The triangular circulation of European designs and art objects between porcelain and enamel manufacturers and decorators in Jingdezhen, Guangzhou and Beijing further stimulated the production of objects in *euroiserie* style.

In post-imperial China, *euroiserie* once more gained agency during the Republican Period, simultaneously recalling a Chinese dynastic high point and asserting Chinese ambitions toward a modern, internationally engaged society. The recent display of “International Art” to the Chinese public advertises, for the first time, this aspect of Sino-European interaction, previously little known beyond specialist circles. These objects continue to express the political aspirations of the Chinese state, declaring its global presence and economic strength, in its ability to access and possess objects from across the globe.