

The Map and the Territory: The Political Uses of Buddhist Art in Late Imperial China

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Many of the strategies used to fortify imperial power that we have seen in societies like ancient Egypt were also used in imperial China. The last imperial Chinese dynasty occurred from 1644 to 1912. In the eighteenth century the emperors, who were Manchus, not Han, took control of China within the course of a decade. The conquest of central Asia was not completed until 1770s.

There are many reasons why the Qing period is fascinating, but it has been less studied than it deserves: for one thing, it featured one of the most interesting of all Chinese imperial courts. The empire brought to its capital people from all over the world as technical experts and agents. Europeans came too; the Qing period was not strictly Chinese, but rather a hybrid administration composed of Central Asian Muslims, southwestern minorities, and other ethnic groups. Diplomacy and bloody military campaigns occurred. The Qing emperors were always able to present themselves as benevolent despots, and Europe developed an image of the Qing as an empire ruled by many. A notion of the Qing empire as a civil service entity comes to the fore, despite the Qing appetite for revenge.

The fourth emperor of this dynasty managed to bring Central Asia under control of the Qing. Hongli, known as the the Qianlong Emperor, was brilliantly creative: his public relations experts were able to present a picture of the empire as a place where ethnic harmony ruled. The violence of empire building under the Qianlong Emperor and his predecessors was easily reconciled with their earnest devotion to Tibetan-style Buddhism, since it does not require peace (or vegetarianism) and allows for violent and horrific imagery. Qianlong was cast by his Tibetan advisors as a mighty general who brought in a new age in which a new Buddha would preside. Buddhism was used to cast Central Asians as a barbaric horde requiring a prophetically determined destruction.

China continued to mature technologically, and to undergo international influences. Jesuits arriving in China in the late 16th century proselytized with moderate success—their political motives were suspected and scrutinized carefully.

The diverse influences at the Qing court can be explored in Giuseppe Castiglione's painting, *Qianlong Emperor on Horseback* (1758 – *figure 1*). Born in Milan, Castiglione came to the Qing court during the reign of Qianlong's father. Castiglione was an artist trained in Baroque technique. Western sources inform this work, including the famous statue of Marcus Aurelius on horseback in Rome (*figure 2*) and Peter Paul Rubens's painting of Ferdinand of Austria (*figure 3*). By contrast, Castiglione's Qianlong portrait is very reserved. For one thing, there are no shadows in the portrait—we know that Castiglione was ordered by the emperor to eliminate shadows. Shadows are seldom present in Chinese art, in which the time of day is generalized.



Figure 1
Giuseppe Castiglione, *The Qianlong Emperor on Horseback*, probably 1758; and *Killing a Tiger*, 1750s (Palace Museum, Beijing).



Figure 2
Marcus Aurelius, 176 CE, Rome



Figure 3
Peter Paul Rubens, *Ferdinand of Austria*



Figure 4
Gesar of Ling, Tibetan thangka, 16th-17th centuries



Figure 5
Huang Longwang, *Cut-Off Mountain Picture*



Figure 6
Giuseppe Castiglione,
Qianlong in Court Robes, ca. 1736
(Palace Museum, Beijing)

In addition to European art, other sources inform Castiglione's portrait. Gesar of Ling's Tibetan Thangka paintings of the 16th and 17th centuries provide another influence (*figure 4*). From the greater Tibetan realm (including Mongolia) we have an image of a mounted divine figure with a red face and a striped blue, white, and red headdress. Qianlong's helmet is astounding: it is silver, with a Sanskrit inscription ("dharani"). A deluxe box contains the helmet. Another neglected source of influence for Castiglione's work is Huang Longwang's "Cut-Off Mountain Picture" (1350; Jiangsu Provincial Museum – *figure 5*), which features a series of rolling hills painted in the traditional Chinese manner. The diverse sources of this portrait need to be recognized and discussed. The idea of an Italian Christian artist working in a pseudo-traditional style in a Chinese empire is worth researching.

Giuseppe Castiglione's *Portrait of Qianlong in Court Robes*, ca. 1736 (Palace Museum, Beijing – *figure 6*) contrasts with Hyacinthe Rigaud's portrait of Louis XVI of France at the Louvre (*figure 7*). Both are royal, full-length portraits, with the subjects at their thrones. Castiglione's work displays his painterly love of texture, in this case silk. A. A. Antipov's portrait of Catherine the Great of Russia, at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, is another portrait of a seated royal figure (*figure 8*). In contrast with the Qianlong seated portrait, the two European royal portraits feature shadows, and their subjects are not facing squarely forward.



Figure 7
Hyacinthe Rigaud, Louis XVI of France
(Musée du Louvre, Paris)



Figure 8
A.A. Antipov, Catherine II the Great of
Russia
(Hermitage, St. Petersburg)

The Qing engaged in warfare with a number of potent figures in Central Asia, from the 1630s to the founding of the dynasty. Khovd city in Mongolia contains a statue of Galdan, leader of the Mongol Zunghars. The Kangxi Emperor's war campaigns extended deep into Central Asia in the late seventeenth century, involving great difficulty due to the distances involved.

Engravings initially drawn by Giuseppe Castiglione in China were sent off and then engraved in Europe—the setting of the Siege of the Black River, 1765–74, for instance (*figure 9*). As is clear from the results, none of these artists had been to Central Asia or were remotely acquainted with its geography.



Figure 9
Giuseppe Castiglione, et al., *Setting the Siege of the Black River*, 1765-74

Qianlong as the Manjughosa or Manjuu emperor is illustrated in one portrait (circa late 1750s), which offers a highly schematized illustration of the *zhabten* (“feet firm”) ritual to ensure good health. Castiglione was obliged to participate in all sorts of court projects including this ritual portrait. He was asked to paint a highly detailed face of the emperor, then to leave the room while Tibetan artists painted the rest. The result shows Qianlong as a Tibetan leader surrounded by tankas and counselors (*figures 10 and 11*).

Of his 40,000 poems, fully a third of the Qianlong Emperor’s are about objects, mainly possessions. He gave names to many things. Castiglione oversaw but did not personally paint, a 1761 work—*Ten Thousand Envoys Bring Tribute*. It shows the kinds of things that people brought as tribute. The gifts the emperor favored the most had to do with mensuration, or measurement, in a broad sense—telescopes (about which the emperor wrote two poems) and clocks. The Qing emperors loved clocks. There is a clock museum in the Forbidden City, for example. A Beauvais tapestry depicting Jesuit astronomical implements was used at the Qing court in the early 18th century (*figure 12*). Telescopes and other astronomical implements, presently mounted in Beijing on an old wall, give a different idea of how power could be held.



Figure 10
Qianlong as the Manjughosa Emperor
Ca. late 1750s

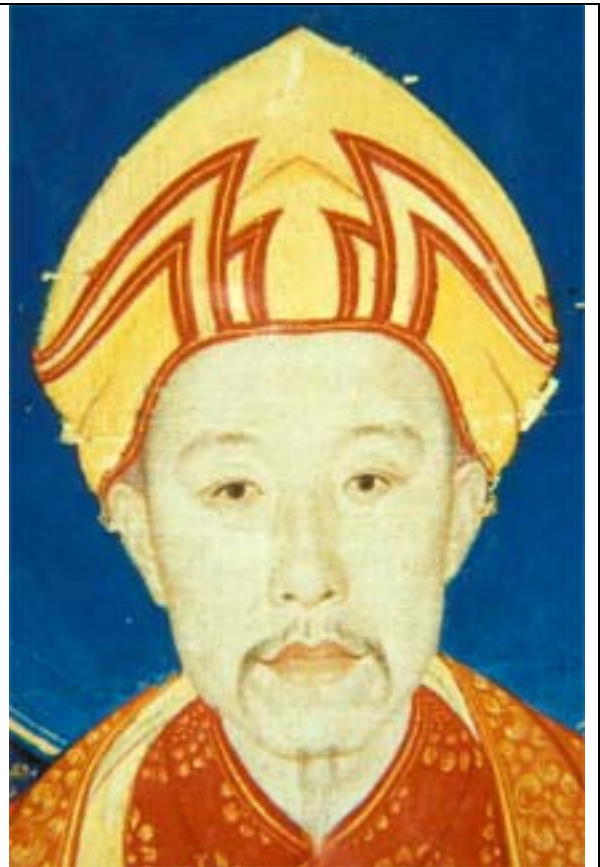


Figure 11
Detail of *figure 10*.



Figure 12
Beauvais tapestry depicting Jesuit astronomical implements in use at the Qing court
Early 18th century



Figure 13
Guntherus Ziner “T and O” map
1472

One aspect of power to consider is mapmaking: several maps from this period are instructive regarding conceptualizations of power. To begin with, maps are thought of as rational depictions of the world, intended to provide an objective and sensible means of getting from Point A to Point B. We think maps rationalize spatial relationships. Our view of what constitutes the world is quite different from the one the Manchus enjoyed. A photograph of Earth from space seems neutral; yet, because the picture was taken by NASA astronauts, it shows the Americas most prominently. All maps have strategies, and it’s interesting to consider what a map’s agenda might be.

“T-and-O maps” were meant to focus on the center of interest to the mapmakers. The Erbsdorf Map of 1272 is an example, as is the *Guntherus Ziner Map* of 1472 (*figure 13*). Were they intended to chart an interior pilgrimage? The Holy Land is at the center of these.

Some maps are strongly dependent on texts explaining the terrain in more subjective terms. The 1570 Ortelius *Typus Orbis Terrarum* (Library of Congress) is a new kind of map. The position of the eye is located quite high: the entire world is splayed out and the viewer has a godlike, omniscient perspective.

The highly similar *Wanguo Quantu* (“Complete Map of Ten Thousand Countries”), by Matteo Ricci, was given to the Chinese Emperor in 1574. The Ricci map shifts the continents to make China more central (*figure 14*).



Figure 14
 Matteo Ricci's *Wanguo Quantu*
 (Complete Map of Ten Thousand Countries)
 1574

Ferdinand Verbiest and Adam von Schall, both Jesuits, created the map of the world contained in a book engraving in the Getty museum. It is a map of China, and Adam von Schall is wearing a Mandarin badge in the picture. Ferdinand Verbiest also produced the map *Kuny Wantu*—a complete map of the world in eight separate panels, in 1674. While it allowed rearrangement as one chooses, the text maintains an order; the continuity is lost if you put the map in a different order. This piece, too, takes a godlike perspective, from somewhere out in space.

The narrative scrolls produced in court were very different. Wang Hui, et al., made a scroll called *The Kangxi Emperor's Southern Tour* in 1689. We watch him as a bird might. These are on the website put together by the Metropolitan museum which allows you to follow the scroll:
http://www.learn.columbia.edu/nehasian/html/neh_geo_con_china.html

The *Kangxi and Qianlong Map* of the Shengjing (Manchu Capital) illustrates knowledge declining in the far western regions. The question of why such a map should have been made is an interesting one. A.A. Giorgi's *Mount Meru* map attempted to copy a Buddhist cosmological map in his *Alphabetum Tiberanum* of 1759. We also have Tsewang Tashi's *The Demoness* map of the 1990s, which showed how Tibet itself came to be "pacified" and Buddhified (Tsering Tashi, *The Demoness* – figure 15).



Figure 15
Tsering Tashi, *The Demoness*, 1990s

The *Shambhala* Tibetan thangka “map” is the origin of our notion of Shangri-La (*figures 16 and 17*). This image features Rudracakrin, the last king in the nineteenth century in Tibet. The map displays three things:

- a) Shambhala—a place existing somewhere in the snowy North;
- b) A map of the fantasy land of Shangri-La; and
- c) An internal map of the heart or soul of the seeker.



Figure 16
Details of *Shambhala* Tibetan thangka “map”



Figure 17
Shambhala, with Rudracakrin, the last king
19th century, Tibet

An interesting thing to reflect on in connection with this is Jorge Luis Borges's short story "An Exactitude in Science," in which maps were made larger and larger in scale until they made a 1 to 1 scale map, which covered the entire kingdom. This sort of thing occurs in the attempt to recreate the entire kingdom in miniature at Chengde, Hebei (northeast of Beijing), with the Bishushanzhuang ("Retreat to Beat the Heat"). There in a vast imperial retreat for Qing dynasty emperors, buildings and landscapes were copied from famous gardens and structures throughout China (figures 18 and 19).



Figure 18
Chengde, replica of gardens of Suzhou
in southern China.



Figure 19
Suzhou gardens.

Summarized by Timothy Doran.