

**Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Ning Ding, eds., *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges between China and the West*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015. 320pp. \$55. ISBN 9781606064573.**

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*Qing Encounters* includes sixteen diverse, yet entwined, essays that demonstrate the scope of the research currently advancing in this field. As Jonathan Hay articulates in the foreword, “Qing” and “China” are not interchangeable terms—and neither are “the West” and eighteenth-century Europe synonymous entities—and his explication serves the reader well (vii-ix). Understanding what is meant by a Qing frame of reference (artistically, politically, economically) is essential when we read the volume’s essays. Also, the book chronologically centers itself on the reign of three emperors: Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, spanning the period 1661 to 1796. In this sense, its focus is the eighteenth century rather than the duration of the Qing empire. However, this prevents the volume from becoming too sprawling or incoherent.

Furthermore, the introduction suggests that this volume intends to transcend the pre-existing paradigms in the humanities, specifically art history. First, the editors, Chu and Ding, establish that both the European and Chinese perspective will be considered, as this “allows for a new and more nuanced understanding of the reciprocal aspect of encounters between China and the West and the tangible products that resulted from them” (1). Additionally, they state that the book not only addresses the exchange of visual materials, but “goes beyond that to focus on the mutual borrowing and adaptation of foreign forms, techniques, and modes of representation that followed the exchange of visual materials and to analyze the complex hybrid creations that were their result” (2). To this end, the book is organized into four parts: “modes of collecting and display” in China and Europe; “the role of visual culture in the process of information exchange”; the exchange and adoption of techniques of representation in both China and Europe (e.g., one-point perspective); and finally, the resulting hybrid products, including chinoiserie and its counterpart in China, euroiserie.

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The essays in Part One ask to what extent foreign objects were absorbed into their new spaces of display, and how they might have showcased cultural differences. Richard Vinograd's essay on "Hybrid Spaces" coins a term, "transportal" (16); he defines this neologism as "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" (18-19). European scenes painted on Chinese-produced porcelain offer one such example. Anna Grasskamp and Kristel Smentek explore the issue of displaying foreign objects within culturally-defined spaces. Grasskamp, in her case study of European mounting/framing of Chinese wares and Chinese staging of European artifacts, demonstrates how "foreign" objects came to be integrated into preexisting systems of display. Smentek, who notes that "Sino-European encounters in this period were mediated more by things than by people" (43), explains how the mounting of Chinese porcelain in gilt bronze served as "a form of cultural translation, a negotiation of difference rather than a denigration or subjugation of it" (44). This is a marked departure from past literature, which, Smentek argues, is tinged with modernist biases against the decorative arts and ornamental features (45). Smentek's essay is among the more narrowly-focused in the volume, which allows the reader to fully appreciate her argumentation, and to understand how the engagement with objects exemplified interculturality in the eighteenth century.

Lastly, Mei Mei Rado contributes a fascinating analysis of European silks at the Qianlong emperor's court. Despite their low rate of survival, the silks were prized for the symbolic richness and incorporated into Qing imperial court rituals. By bedecking himself in European silks (and through his craftsmen's mastery of the techniques), the emperor demonstrated his "unique access to the West" (72), and even his conquest of it by material proxy.

Part Two, centering on prints and gardens, explicates the role of visual material in information exchanges between China and Europe. True to the book's mission, multiple perspectives that look to interconnectedness prevent either a Eurocentric or Sinocentric reading. John Finlay's essay is a case study of French minister of state Henri Bertin's collection of Chinese objects; in this essay, the focus is on paintings of Yuanmingyuan that Bertin brought together. Bertin, Finlay notes, corresponded with the Jesuits in Beijing (who are ever-present in this volume), and sought out Chinese paintings. French collectors such as Bertin "sought authentic and in-depth knowledge of China, and they

saw images, in combination with texts, as the primary sources of such knowledge” (91). Marcia Reed also focuses on prints, but writes instead about the copperplate engravings that Qianlong commissioned from France to commemorate the East Turkestan Campaign. This was a technical information exchange from which Chinese artists learned European printmaking methods and adapted them to suit their own purposes.

Che-Bing Chiu and Yuen Lai Winnie Chan navigate botany and gardens, respectively. Like Finlay, Chiu begins his essay at Yuanmingyuan, but rather than images of the site, he is concerned with its gardens. Chiu expertly reconstructs the gardens that would have surrounded the site’s European Pavilions; European seeds and plants were imported for this purpose. Chan situates her essay slightly later and in Canton, where local and foreign customers alike sought out large commercial nurseries to purchase commodified plants. She also notes that European interest in Chinese plants led to the commercialization of the previously academic exchange of information, and concludes:

For the Chinese merchants, the commercial vista of waterfront with factories reminded them not only of their exploits in trade but also of the ‘othering’ of their culture, which brought with it a whole new way of thinking about success not as intellectual accomplishment but as commercial feat. (120)

As the topic of Chinese influence on European garden design has received increasing scholarly attention in the past decade, Chan’s essay is a welcomed addition probing the effect that European interest had on the Cantonese front.

Part Three will appeal most particularly to the reader interested in the formal qualities of art and in the exchange of technical knowledge and skills. Yue Zhuang contributes an ambitious and fascinating—though not wholly convincing—essay on “Hatching in the Void.” She first analyzes the image in question, the Chinese woodcut *Clouds over the Western Mountain at Dawn*, within a neo-Confucian framework, and delineates how it expresses Chinese cosmic philosophy. Then she examines the Jesuit Matteo Ripa’s copy, which employs a European hatching technique to fill the void; this, she asserts, is an imposition of a Christian world order onto the original (149-53). Though the reader is left with many unanswered questions (did Ripa perceive his act to be

what Zhuang suggests?), the essay is nonetheless engaging and thought-provoking. Lihong Liu turns to the concept of shadow in both the European and Chinese artistic tradition before the eighteenth-century period of encounter and examines the similarities and differences in shadow, shade, reflection, modeling, chiaroscuro, and perspective. Most notably, she explains the Chinese concept of *ying*, which referred simultaneously to projected shadow, shade, and later, chiaroscuro, and how this affected the interpretation of Western techniques of rendering light and shade. Additionally, Liu explicates the conflict in depicting shadows, with Chinese artists seeing them as blemishes and as antagonistic to clarity, and with Western artists lacking any sympathy to this viewpoint. Her compelling conclusion urges readers to “consider shadow to be as much a cultural critical term as an artistic technique” (208). This consideration would help “to shift discussion away from the apologetic argument that simply seeks to prove the tangible existence of shadow (specifically, chiaroscuro) in Chinese pictorial tradition, an argument that implicitly defers to an accepted European standard.”

Ya-Chen Ma returns to the East Turkestan Campaign engravings, and elucidates how the Chinese artists navigated between domestic and European techniques of representation. Ma notes how they adapted Western perspective insofar as it emphasized the Qing military’s grandeur, glory, and discipline. Kristina Kleutghen shifts the focus to another urban center, Suzhou, to demonstrate how the adoption of European-style one-point perspective began to spread across the empire. Furthermore, she does not interpret any Christian symbolism in this, as Zhuang does, but rather, sees that the Kangxi emperor embraced Western learning so as to present himself as the ideal sage ruler in the Confucian tradition.

Part Four examines the myriad hybrid products that resulted from contact between China and the West, including both chinoiserie and euroiserie (or europénerie). Greg M. Thomas and Stacey Sloboda focus on chinoiserie: the former concerned with its manifestation at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, and the latter with decorative objects. Thomas masterfully navigates the perplexing spaces and objects within the Royal Pavilion, and emphasizes that, although its chinoiserie interiors were created many decades after the style’s peak, it is a style which commands scholarly recognition as one which was “capable of generating serious and meaningful cultural dialogue with China and Chinese culture. No ignorant whim, the pavilion was a spectacle of intelligent, creative

internationalism” (233). The section on how George IV added French ormolu mounts to imported Chinese porcelain echoes Smentek’s essay. Sloboda distinguishes between chinoiserie and European products made “in the Chinese taste” (249). Decoration (i.e., in a chinoiserie style), she argues, by nature of its marginality, was a form of cross-cultural communication, as it reconciled cultural, pictorial, and linguistic differences, and functioned as a unifying link between otherwise disparate objects (249-50).

Returning to Canton, Yeewan Koon demonstrates how images produced by Chinese artists for European audiences were among the most intriguing of hybrid objects. Her case study is the album of Chinese street types and trades by Pu Qua. His album drew on the visual predecessors of Chinese officials’ inspection tour illustrations as well as the Western *Cries of London* and *Cris de Paris* illustrations. Lastly, Jennifer Milam turns to Peter the Great’s Russia; this is a welcomed point of departure as the essays otherwise assume an implicit binary between Qing China and Western Europe (represented mostly by France and Great Britain). Milam argues that, while Russia assumed a degree of ambivalence to its position of in-betweenness, European chinoiserie took on new meaning in light of Russia’s longstanding relationship with China.

Each of the sixteen essays adds invaluable knowledge to the field of cross-cultural studies, particularly in art history. However, in a recent review on *Journal18*, Craig Clunas observed that the omission of Edward Said in every essay, the foreword, the introduction, and the index, is curious. I am inclined to agree with Clunas, who in that review, asserts that there is an unexplained and intangible utopianism that underpins the scope of the volume. Thomas summarizes the view when he explains that George IV’s creative vision “positioned China as one elite among equals” (245). But given that this was in the immediate lead-up to the Opium Wars, this statement, and others like it, need to be further explained. While a teleological reading is certainly not ideal, either, the complete lack of any reference to *Orientalism* or the paradigm which Said created detracts from otherwise stellar analyses. At the very least, the fact that the essayists have distanced themselves from a Saidian interpretation could have been addressed in the foreword or introduction, to assuage the reader’s curiosity.

Nonetheless, *Qing Encounters* is an entirely worthwhile read for scholars in any humanities field, particularly for those interested in intercultural perspectives. The essays are balanced and no one viewpoint is privileged. The

illustrations are glossy and in color, which greatly enhances the reading experience. Though the entry point is art history, this book opens the area of cross-cultural humanities for scholars of many fields.

## Works Cited

- Chu, Petra ten-Doesschate and Ning Ding, eds. *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges between China and the West*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015. Print.
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