

This guide is given out free to teachers and students with an exhibition ticket at the Education Desk.

It is available to other visitors from the RA Shop at a cost of £3.95 (while stocks last).

# CHINA

The Three Emperors  
1662–1795

Royal  
Academy  
of Arts

# CHINA

## The Three Emperors 1662–1795

Main Galleries,  
12 November 2005 – 17 April 2006

Sponsored by



An Introduction to the Exhibition  
for Teachers and Students  
Written by Dr Frances Wood

For the Education Department  
© Royal Academy of Arts

### FRONT COVER

Cat. 11 (detail)

*A Scene Described in the Qianlong Emperor's Poem  
'Bird's-Eye View of the Capital' 1767 by Xu Yang*  
The Palace Museum, Beijing

### BACK COVER

Cat. 173 (detail)

*From Twelve Beauties at Leisure Painted for Prince Yinzhen,  
the Future Yongzheng Emperor,*  
late Xangxi period (between 1709 and 1723)  
The Palace Museum, Beijing

Designed by Isambard Thomas, London

Printed by Burlington

Royal  
Academy  
of Arts

## INTRODUCTION

By the end of the eighteenth century, China was the richest and most populous state in the world, and its territories, including parts of Russia and Outer Mongolia, stretched across northern Central Asia as far as the Pamirs, covering twelve million square kilometres. In this exhibition we will be looking at the collections of the Qing emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong who were responsible for bringing the country to this state of relative unity and prosperity.

## HISTORY

Although they are now thoroughly identified with China, the emperors of the Qing dynasty were not Chinese but descendants of the Jurchen, a group from the far north-east of China who had abandoned the term Jurchen, associated with historical submission to Chinese rule, and instead called themselves Manchu. Their leader then proclaimed himself emperor of the Qing (pure, clear) dynasty and in 1644 replaced the Ming dynasty as rulers of China. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the problem of identity, of the balance between ancestral heritage and Chinese culture, was gradually resolved.

In the early stages of Manchu rule, the emperors still encountered considerable loyalty to the Chinese Ming dynasty. The Aisin-Gioro clan, to which the three Qing emperors belonged, had consolidated their power from the 1590s through the organisation of the Eight Banners.

The Banners, military groups named for their distinctive banners, also formed the basis of social organisations that had been in place before the Manchu conquest of China, where warriors' families were included in the groups and provided with educational opportunities and agricultural land. As the Qing moved southwards, they incorporated many Chinese (who eventually outnumbered the Manchus) into the Banners, providing for them and their families and thereby instilling loyalty. These were the troops that the Kangxi emperor led against three rebellious Chinese generals, finally crushing their revolt in 1681.

## PAINTING

Chinese resistance had to be defeated, but for the emperors Chinese culture was something to be admired and acquired. For thousands of years, painting in China was considered, with calligraphy, to be one of the highest forms of expression. Painters ranged in status from skilled studio craftsmen who produced paintings for the masses, to scholar-artists who supposedly painted only for pleasure. An important painting instruction manual, *The Mustard Seed Garden*, published during the reign of the Kangxi emperor, included specified ways of

painting various pictorial elements such as rocks and figures. Practice and concentration were required and the artist's tools and materials played a significant role in the rituals that led to the perfecting of his art.

### SCROLLS

Painted on paper or silk, paintings came in two main formats: the hanging or vertical scroll, to be displayed on special occasions, and the hand scroll which, often extremely long, can only be examined three or four feet at a time as it is unrolled in sections. Significantly, Chinese painting does not present the viewer with a single 'window' into the world or a single perspective point, as a Western painting usually does, but rather with multiple perspectives that depend on where the viewer's eye is engaged.

### THE MANCHUS

The Manchus practised shamanism, a shaman (the only Manchu loan-word in fairly common usage in English) being someone believed to be capable of travelling to, communicating with and influencing the spirit world. The Manchus continued this practice after their conquest of China, claiming descent from an ancestor born after his mother held a fruit dropped from the mouth of a sacred magpie. In the Kunning gong (a former residence of the empresses of the Chinese Ming dynasty), a kitchen was installed for the preparation of sacrificial offerings of meat, and spirit poles were erected to hoist up the offerings for the magpies that roosted in the trees of the Forbidden City.

It was not only the new emperor's beliefs that differed from those of the Chinese: the Manchu language was quite unrelated to Chinese and closer to the Tungusic languages of northern Asia. Examples of the script, adapted from the Mongolian, can still be seen, side by side with Chinese characters, on the name boards of the halls throughout the Forbidden City.

### THE KANGXI EMPEROR

The Kangxi emperor (ruled 1661–1722) was a third son and was announced as heir when his father lay dying of smallpox. He himself had survived an attack of smallpox (to which the Manchus were particularly prone) and was therefore regarded as potentially long-lived, which may have played a part in his choice as heir and in his reign name which means 'healthy and splendid'. He later said that he had had all his children and soldiers inoculated, an age-old Chinese practice, by the inhalation of tiny pieces of infected skin. Through the

Cat. 120  
Anonymous court artists  
*Portrait of the Kangxi Emperor in Informal Dress Holding a Brush*  
Kangxi period 1662–1722  
Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk  
50.5 x 31.9 cm  
The Palace Museum, Beijing



choice of a third son as heir, the Manchus broke with the Chinese imperial tradition of primogeniture. During the preceding Chinese Ming dynasty, the first-born son was raised in the Forbidden City and all his other brothers were sent away from the capital to prevent jealousy and intrigue. The Manchus, however, kept the emperor's sons in the capital and, from the Yongzheng reign, decreed that they should all be educated together in the Palace School for Princes.

**Cat. 120** This portrait shows the youthful Kangxi emperor engaged in a 'pleasurable activity', calligraphy, which he practised daily, thereby giving the impression that a Manchu emperor might be a member, by proxy, of the Chinese literati. On the screen behind and on the richly coloured carpet, dragons protect the emperor. Dragons were often represented in clouds because they were associated with water. They were also carved on wooden beams in the Imperial Palace, to protect the building from fire. Notice the fact that the emperor is about to start writing from right to left.

How many different systems of perspective are used in this painting? Is the Western system represented? What effect do the grey dragon and cloud have when seen in conjunction with the rich colour elsewhere?

The revolt of the three generals in the 1670s showed the Kangxi emperor that loyalty to the new dynasty was not automatic, so he sought to bring Chinese intellectuals to his aid by commissioning an official history of the Ming dynasty. In 1679, he held a special examination to bring Chinese scholars into official service, selecting learned men and good calligraphers for his Imperial Study. He commissioned many scholarly works such as a complete edition of the poems of the Tang dynasty and in 1716 a Kangxi dictionary which, with its 49,000 characters, set the outer boundaries of the Chinese script.

He made six tours of inspection of southern China, paying particular attention to flood prevention and irrigation schemes to encourage agriculture. For the second of these trips he commissioned a pictorial record, which originally consisted of twelve scrolls showing more than 700 feet of painting, one of which (scroll 11) is partly on show in the exhibition (see cat. 13).

**Cat. 13** This scroll was designed by the famous scholar-painter Wang Hui (1632–1717) to record the Kangxi emperor's visit to the cultural heart of China in the south. (Wang Hui himself came from this part of China, from the lower Yangzi region.) A large team of figure, landscape and architectural painters worked on the huge project (originally twelve scrolls, altogether over 700 feet long) under Wang Hui's supervision. Although minute, the figures are painted in the most vivid and individually expressive manner.

What might be the benefits of multiple perspectives for viewing a scroll like this?  
 What can be gained from the fact that the animated figures are so small?  
 Would you say that the purpose of the scroll was to celebrate ordinary people, the emperor or both? Why do you think this?

The Kangxi emperor also relaxed some of the more oppressive regulations imposed on the vanquished Chinese, ending inequalities of rank and salary between Manchus and Chinese who held parallel posts in his administration. In this way he became known as a conciliatory ruler, who attempted to encourage Chinese support of the dynasty.

In the Manchu tradition, he was a good horseman and archer and an active participant in some of the military campaigns of his reign, such as the long pursuit of the Mongol leader Galdan, whom he drove

'The eleventh scroll respectfully depicts his majesty setting forth from the Western Water Gate of Jiangning (Nanjing), passing Stone Citadel and travelling through the dense forests and beautiful scenery from Guanyin Gate to Swallow Cliff. Sailing down the Yangzi, the ornate banners shone across the river and the mountains, the brilliance of the retinue outshone the sun and the clouds.'

Preface of the scroll *The Kangxi Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Eleven: Nanjing to Jinshan*

**Cat. 13**  
 Wang Hui (1632–1717) and assistants  
*The Kangxi Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Eleven: Nanjing to Jinshan (detail)*  
 1691–98  
 Handscroll, colour on silk  
 67.8 x 2612 cm  
 The Palace Museum, Beijing



out of Central Asia in 1697. Foreigners who met him, including Jesuits and members of the Dutch and Russian embassies, remembered him as intensely curious. He was fascinated by Western science, participating in the great contest between Jesuits and Court astronomers, choosing the former to head the Imperial Board of Astronomy and teach him Western mathematics and science. In another break with the Ming Chinese tradition, he also summoned the French Jesuit Fr Gerbillon to teach him mathematics in his private quarters at the far end of the Forbidden City, previously closed to outsiders. Gerbillon also served as an interpreter in the border negotiations with Russia (1689) and in a geographical survey of China (1707–11). It is perhaps important to note that all his conversations with the emperor were conducted in Manchu, not Chinese.

### THE YONGZHENG EMPEROR

According to Manchu tradition, the Kangxi emperor was succeeded by his fourth son, the Yongzheng emperor (who ruled from 1723 to 1736). His imperial title, Yongzheng, means 'harmonious and correct', whilst his family name, Yinzhen, means 'inheritance of luck'. In some ways, his reign can be seen as a reaction against that of his father: where the Kangxi emperor was conciliatory, the Yongzheng emperor acted firmly against corruption, offering bonuses to demonstrably incorruptible officials and thereby greatly improving the flow of revenue. Capable of extremely hard work, he not only dealt with dozens of daily memorials (government reports) from all over the country, but he developed the system whereby 'Palace Memorials' established by his father came directly to him, bypassing officials of the Outer Court and providing him with private information.

**Cat. 11** In this view of the Forbidden City, painted in 1767 during the reign of the Qianlong emperor, we can see how Western single-point perspective is used brilliantly to express the actual progressive inaccessibility of the imperial palace: as we, the public, advance under a triumphal arch in front of the great Qian men gate through the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tianan men) and the Meridian Gate into the palace itself, we can make out less and less, until the emperor's private quarters at the very rear are almost hidden from view in the distance.

Red is the colour of good fortune in China. How has it been used here?

Is this a map or a painting, a record or an impression, or a bit of everything?

What might the spiral in the top right-hand corner of the painting be?



**Cat. 11**  
**Xu Yang (fl.c.1751–1776)**  
*A Scene Described in the*  
*Qianlong Emperor's Poem*  
*'Bird's-Eye View of the Capital'*  
 1767  
 Hanging scroll, colour on silk  
 255 x 233.8 cm  
 The Palace Museum, Beijing

It is clear that there was considerable rivalry between the Kangxi emperor's twenty sons (he had had thirty-six but only twenty survived), since on his accession the Yongzheng emperor imprisoned a number of his brothers, and remained touchy about accusations that he had usurped the throne. In order to control imperial heirs, he insisted upon their all being taught in the school inside the Forbidden City and instructed in Confucian morals by the best Chinese teachers. He also instituted the practice of concealing the name of the designated heir in a box kept in the Qianqing hall, to be opened only after the emperor's death.

### THE QIANLONG EMPEROR

The Yongzheng emperor nominated his fourth son, Hongli, meaning 'Great Successor', as his heir and he ruled from 1736 to 1796 as the Qianlong or 'eminent sovereign' emperor. He had been a great favourite of his grandfather, the Kangxi emperor, with whom he would go hunting as a boy. Some say that the Kangxi emperor chose Yongzheng as his successor so that he would eventually be succeeded by his grandson, although that would seem a rather risky prospect, as the Yongzheng emperor had ten sons (though only four survived into adulthood).

The long reign of the Qianlong emperor (who retired in 1796, three years before his death) may be considered the height of the Qing. Though his Ten Great Campaigns were not all as successful as he claimed, he brought much of Central Asia under Qing rule, vastly increasing the size of his empire. The costs of his campaigns were met by an increase in cultivated land, with new crops, such as maize and peanuts, being grown and with firm controls on revenue collection. Well versed in Chinese culture, the Qianlong emperor is supposed to have written essays and as many as 42,000 poems. He developed the imperial collection, commissioning paintings and artefacts from Chinese and foreign artists, as well as collecting ancient Chinese objects and ordering the cataloguing of palace paintings and calligraphy.

**Cat. 263** Liu Ping was an insect and animal painter in a long Chinese tradition of illustrated fables. As with Aesop, it seems more telling to transpose stories showing human weakness or vulnerability through the animal or insect world. This painting shows three tree monkeys seemingly engaged in discussion, like three old men under a tree.

How has the artist used the landscape to emphasise the relationship between the three monkeys?

How does the fact that the top monkey disappears off the frame affect the story and the sense of their conversation?

'There is tea, made from fresh snow on a little brazier slung between two horses. There is the perfect flavour of fresh bream and carp from the mountain streams, caught by oneself in the early morning ... There is venison, roasted over an open fire by a tent pitched on the sunny slope of a mountain; or the liver of a newly-killed stag, cooked with one's own hands (even if the rain is falling), and eaten with salt and vinegar.'  
The Xangxi Emperor



Like his grandfather Kangxi, the Qianlong emperor made five great tours of inspection of southern China, reversing the tradition of the Ming emperors who only left the Forbidden City to visit the imperial altars but did not venture outside Peking.

His daily routine was described in detail by the Jesuit priest Fr Benoist. He rose at six, ate alone at eight (his meal taking about 15 minutes) and then read reports and memorials, discussing them with his ministers. He held an audience for newly appointed officials and had another brief solitary meal at two. Then he would read, write verse or paint and perhaps take some 'light refreshment' before bed. Unlike the Chinese, the Qianlong emperor took milk in his tea, with special herds of dairy cows providing the Manchu imperial family with milk. A menu for one of his meals in 1754 included a dish of fat chicken, boiled duck and bean curd, swallows' nests and shredded smoked duck, smoked chicken, shredded stewed chicken, Chinese cabbage, salted duck and pork, bamboo-shoot steamed dumplings, rice cakes with honey and side dishes of pickled aubergine, pickled cabbage and cucumbers in soy sauce.

**Cat. 263**  
Luo Ping  
From *Insects, Birds and Beasts*,  
leaf 9: *Tree Monkeys*

1774  
One of ten album leaves, ink on paper  
20.8 x 27.5 cm each  
The Palace Museum, Beijing

'In the morning you see three  
of them, in the evening four,  
Princes transformed into old men,  
Each wearing a soft fur coat,  
Monkeys, they are also known as the  
Three Dukes'  
Poem inscribed on *Tree Monkeys*  
painting

## THE MANCHU HERITAGE

Despite his absorption in Chinese high culture, the Qianlong emperor was ever conscious of his Manchu origins. His grandfather the Kangxi emperor wrote lyrically of the pleasure of being outdoors, in the mountains of the north-east.

For the Kangxi emperor, hunting was more than simply killing game. (He boasted a lifetime bag of countless deer of different sorts, 135 tigers, 25 leopards and 20 bears.) It was also a preparation for warfare and a test of discipline and organisation. In 1636, he wrote that the younger generation of Manchus was losing its traditional martial skills. The Qianlong emperor had his grandfather's critical words carved on a stone stele near the Arrow pavilion in the Forbidden City where he presided over compulsory archery and riding competitions between the young princes.

In order to pursue the joys of hunting and riding, all three emperors, Kangxi and Qianlong in particular, spent time away from the Forbidden City. The Kangxi emperor built himself a grand garden residence outside Peking and in 1703 began construction of a summer palace at Rehe (Hot Springs), now Chengde, some 150 kilometres northeast of Peking. The Yongzheng emperor spent time in the Yuanming yuan garden (the Old Summer Palace) outside Peking, which was later greatly enlarged and elaborated by the Qianlong emperor. Qianlong also enlarged and improved the Rehe summer palace. He often spent most of the year away from the Forbidden City, but he was invariably followed by his entire court and all his ministers so that the work of government and his daily routine, as described by Fr Benoist, could continue unchanged.

The Manchus' abiding love of riding and archery helped to create the style of their clothes. While the Ming emperors and their courtiers wore full, flowing robes with long, loose sleeves, the Manchus favoured tighter garments, buttoned down the right side, with narrow sleeves and split skirts (over trousers) for easier riding. The cuffs of the sleeves were cut in a horse-hoof shape, designed to protect the hands against the cold when riding and they wore long, dark, silk boots with thick soles in a lighter colour, whose stiffness enabled riders to stand in the stirrups. Manchu empresses and palace women wore similar robes to those of men with the same fastening and cuffs. The Qianlong emperor criticised palace women for forgetting their Manchu origins if they adjusted their robes according to the Chinese wide-sleeved style or wore Chinese jewellery.

According to the Qing dress code, Manchu women wore three earrings in each ear and, in the Manchu tradition, they did not bind their feet. There seems to have been no attempt by the Manchus to prohibit foot-binding amongst Chinese women but they did, however, impose the Manchu hairstyle on all Chinese men, which caused much resentment. Chinese men were used to wearing their long hair in a

loose bun under a cap, but the Manchus shaved the front of their head, growing the back hair and wearing it in a long plait. It is interesting to note that this hairstyle, an invariable part of the stereotype of the Chinese man for foreign visitors from the seventeenth century onwards, was not Chinese at all, but Manchu.

## RELIGION AND RITUAL

The Manchu emperors continued the shamanistic daily offerings of their own tradition but also conformed to Chinese ritual by adopting Confucian values of rule both at home and in court. At the New Year and on their birthdays, they followed the Confucian practice of making offerings to their ancestors in front of the ancestral portraits that were hung in the Imperial Ancestral Temple. The Chinese used a luni-solar calendar, requiring the insertion of an extra, or intercalary, month every few years to correct the shortfall of the lunar cycle. The New Year began with the first new moon after the winter solstice and, with the imperial almanacs reverently placed in sedan chairs for honourable dispatch throughout the country, the emperor himself initiated the agricultural year by ploughing a ceremonial furrow at the Altar of Agriculture. The emperor's plough was pulled by yellow oxen and his plough and trowel were also imperial yellow. The emperor was followed by the Minister of Finance who flourished a whip, and the Viceroy of the Metropolitan Province, who carried a box of rice. Lesser officials ploughed, too, and the work was finished off by peasants. The imperial grain produced here was reserved for sacrificial offerings.

Inside the Forbidden City was the Altar of the Earth and Grain, where the emperors prayed and made offerings in spring and autumn and occasionally came to pray for rain during droughts and dry weather in times of flooding. In the western or 'Sea' palaces (today's Beihai Park) there was an Altar to Silkworms where the empresses and palace women raised silkworms and made sacrifices to the Goddess of Silkworms. Other traditional Chinese forms of worship continued by the Manchu emperors included the veneration of Confucius himself (in a shrine next door to the Imperial Study) and, in the Hall for the Transmission of the Mind, of gods such as Xiannong, traditionally said to have invented agriculture and pharmacology, and the legendary emperor Fu Xi who invented hunting, fishing and musical instruments. Wearing special robes of different colours (red for the sun and a fine, icy blue for the moon), the emperors made annual visits to the Altars to the Moon, Sun and Earth, built on the west, east and north of the city. One of the most significant ritual sites was the blue-tiled Temple of Heaven in the south of the city, next door to the Altar of Agriculture.

At the winter solstice, the emperor travelled in a carriage pulled by elephants to the Temple of Heaven, where he prayed and offered sacrifices to heaven and his ancestors and reported on the events of

*'The ruler is the Son of Heaven, he should make reverence for Heaven and concern for the people his first task. Only then will he obtain Heaven's favour.'*

The Confucian view of the ruler's duties as encapsulated by the Qianlong emperor



the old year. He would then return at the beginning of the New Year to pray for heaven's favour. As well as shamanistic and Confucian rituals, the emperors included worship at a Daoist altar within the Forbidden City in their New Year activities. The Yongzheng emperor appointed forty-four Daoist priests to live in the Yuanming yuan, his summer palace just outside Peking. Within the Forbidden City, the emperors also followed traditional Chinese festival activities, letting off firecrackers at the New Year to frighten evil spirits. On New Year's Eve, like ordinary Chinese, they offered cakes and sugar to the kitchen god, whose altar was above the stove, in order to sweeten his words when he made his annual visit to heaven to report on the family. The Qianlong emperor participated in the kitchen god's send-off, beating a drum and, with his court officials lined up in front of him, singing a song called 'The emperor in search of honest officials' and letting off fire-crackers.

**Cat. 15** As we have seen, the emperor, as giver of the calendar, led his people in seasonal activities. Here, in the *Twelfth Lunar Month*, the Yongzheng emperor is pictured in a Chinese gown, under a strange, solid, Western gateway in front of an apparently Western-style building with its stone balcony. The piled rocks and sparse prunus, appreciated in China for flowering in snow, and the leaf-shaped opening in the deer-filled bamboo grove are all characteristic of Chinese garden design, which stressed structure, form and seasonality rather than open vistas and mixed planting.

Describe how the aerial and non-Western viewpoint benefits the spectator.

Why do the Chinese particularly appreciate the fact that the prunus flowers so early?

The emperor is engaged in watching something playful: the making of snow sculptures. What might the benefits be of this to his public image?

### TIBETAN BUDDHISM

Perhaps the most significant religious and ritual practice of the early Qing was that of Tibetan Buddhism. It was a religion of great political significance in the areas bordering China, particularly since its official adoption by Mongol rulers who remained the greatest threat to the Qing emperors. Participation in the Buddhist religion was therefore also of political significance and the Qing emperors established a somewhat unstable protectorate over Tibet. The three emperors built or restored thirty-two Tibetan Buddhist temples in Peking and eleven in the summer resort at Rehe, and sponsored a huge programme to translate 230 Tibetan Buddhist works into Mongolian.

**Cat. 15**  
 Anonymous court artists  
*Portrait of the Yongzheng Emperor*  
*Enjoying Himself during the 12th lunar*  
*month (one of a set of twelve)*  
 Yongzheng period 1723–35  
 Hanging scroll, colour on silk  
 187.5 x 102 cm each  
 The Palace Museum, Beijing





**Fig 1**  
**Stupa**  
 Qianlong mark & period (1736–95)  
 Gilded metal and silver inlaid with  
 ruby, turquoise and lapis lazuli  
 Height 167 cm  
 The Palace Museum, Beijing

Stupas were shrines built to hold holy relics or the ashes of the dead. This gold reliquary is in the same Tibetan form as the large, white stupa that dominates the Beihai park to the northeast of the Forbidden City.

Demonstrating the Qing emperors' seriousness about protecting and spreading the Buddhist faith, in 1720 the Kangxi emperor sponsored the printing of the Mongolian kanjur (Buddhist canon). This was translated into Mongolian and Manchu and published during the Qianlong emperor's reign, when Peking was the centre of Mongolian and Tibetan block-printing. To reinforce his relationship with Tibetan Buddhism, the Qianlong emperor had himself painted in a Tibetan tangka (a Tibetan Buddhist painting on cloth) as the Bodhisattva Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom, and holding the wheel symbol of the cakravartin ('He who turns the wheel', or the ideal world ruler) in his left hand. (A Bodhisattva is one who has achieved enlightenment and could enter nirvana but chooses to stay in the world to help others.) The painting was presented to the Panchen Lama of Tibet, perhaps as a reminder of the power, both temporal and spiritual, of the Qianlong emperor.

Tibetan Buddhism was also attractive in an artistic sense, particularly to the Qianlong emperor. In porcelain, precious metals, and bricks and mortar, he commissioned works in the Tibetan style. Tall jugs of the sort that the Tibetans use for their buttered tea were made for the Forbidden City in porcelain and red lacquer. Buddhist halls in the palace were filled with cloisonné figures (enamel work in which the different colours are separated by strips of flattened wire placed edgewise on a metal backing), altar-pieces and stupas (see **fig. 1**), and the grandest manifestation of this passion for the Tibetan style is seen in the temples built at Rehe, one of which is a replica of the great red Potala palace in Lhasa, the home of the Dalai Lamas.

### PATRONS OF THE ARTS

It was especially in their patronage of the arts that the three emperors demonstrated their gradual adoption of Chinese forms (although they did distance themselves from Chinese tradition in certain areas). However, in their attitude to portraiture, they showed a certain independence. Traditionally, the function of portraiture in China had been largely restricted to that of ancestral worship and most (though not all) portraits were associated with death and mourning and were therefore stiff, formal representations. The Qing emperors, however, commissioned many portraits of themselves and their families that had no such associations. In the extraordinary commemorative album that shows the Yongzheng emperor in a variety of guises – as a Taoist, a fisherman, a hunter, a Buddhist and even in Western dress with curly wig, the style is far from that of a stiff ancestral portrait. Another Yongzheng-period album shows a series of court ladies, dressed in Chinese rather than Manchu clothing (in defiance of the official dress code), sitting pensively in rooms filled with the very kind of antiquities that you will see in the exhibition.

**Cat. 173** This set of beautiful paintings of women was commissioned by the future Yongzheng emperor to cover a screen in his private study (the Deep Willows Reading Hall). These are not portraits of concubines, as has been thought, but of ideal women waiting and longing for love.

Can you guess at the materials and textures that compose or cover objects in this painting?

Can you find a visual equivalent for the woman's feet? Why might her feet be hidden?

What is the woman contemplating and why might this be?

What does this painting reveal about the interior decoration of the Forbidden City?

What can we learn from this painting about the idea of female beauty at the time?

The Qianlong emperor also had himself painted in a variety of guises: as a Buddhist bodhisattva, as a warrior, as a Chinese scholar in a loose Chinese gown and as a family man watching his children setting off fire-crackers at New Year. In many of these paintings, a new style was evolved, combining Chinese and Western techniques. Though many Jesuit artists worked for the Qing court in the various workshops set up in the Forbidden City and in the summer palaces outside Peking, the most famous of these painters was Guiseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), who arrived at the court at the end of the Kangxi era. Castiglione taught many of the Chinese court artists and a number of 'his' paintings were composite efforts, where he worked on the face and figure while Chinese artists supplied the background. This procedure often created an interesting effect whereby a detailed Western-style depiction of a horse, bird or person existed in conjunction with a rather misty, sketched Chinese background. Castiglione, who took the Chinese name Lang Shining, pronounced Sherning, produced detailed portraits of favourite hunting dogs and glossy horses of the imperial stables.

Jesuit courtiers have left amusing accounts of Qianlong's views on painting. He had complained that people painted his head too

**Cat. 173**  
 Anonymous court artists  
 From *Twelve Beauties at Leisure*  
 Painted for Prince Yinchen, the Future  
 Yongzheng Emperor  
 Late Kangxi period (between 1709  
 and 1723)  
 One of a set of twelve screen  
 paintings, ink and colour on silk  
 184 x 98 cm  
 The Palace Museum, Beijing





small so that, when Jesuit artists prepared to paint him, eunuchs crowded in on them, indicating with their widespread hands that the head must be made bigger. Castiglione made several adaptations of traditional Western methods, for example by painting with Chinese brushes. When he tried to paint within the Western tradition by indicating light and shade, the Qianlong emperor complained about dark blotches on his face, so Castiglione solved this problem by using a front-lit style to avoid excessive shadow.

**Cat. 65** In this almost life-size equestrian portrait of the youthful Qianlong emperor, Castiglione reveals both his Western artistic training and his Chinese adaptations.

Identify where the artist is referring to Western artistic traditions and where to Chinese in terms of laws of perspective, light and dark (use of shadow) and subject matter.

Do you think Castiglione's portrait of the horse vies with that of the emperor in terms of charisma?

The Qianlong emperor commissioned Jesuits to make drawings, subsequently reproduced as engravings in Paris, of his ten campaigns of conquest. All the emperors commissioned massive hand-scrolls by Chinese artists depicting important events. These included imperial tours of southern China with winter receptions of ambassadors taking place on the frozen lakes of the Sea Palaces, and skating demonstrations by imperial soldiers on a surface of ice that had been smoothed with hand irons to prevent accidents.

Important visitors, including foreign ambassadors, had to sit out-of-doors in the freezing January weather, watching the skaters and waiting for little bowls of food to be presented to them from the emperor's table. A Dutch embassy of 1794–5 recalled how each time a tiny yellow bowl containing cakes or 'the remnants of gnawed-off bones' was sent over to them, to add insult to already perceived injury, they had to perform the ritual obeisance by kowtowing three times on the frozen ground.

#### PORCELAIN

The yellow porcelain food dishes formed part of the annual shipment of 10,000 items of tableware produced for the court at the great ceramic factories of Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province and shipped smoothly up the Grand Canal. Porcelain was not only required for the Forbidden City, but also for state rituals, where offerings necessitated special coloured porcelain vessels, in deep blue for the Temple of Heaven, yellow for the Temple of the Earth, red for the Temple of the Sun and blue-white for the Temple of the Moon. Decorations on

**Cat. 65**  
 Giuseppe Castiglione (Chinese name  
 Lang Shining, 1688–1766)  
*The Qianlong Emperor in Ceremonial  
 Armour on Horseback*  
 1739 or 1758  
 Hanging scroll (originally a *tieluo*  
 painting), ink and colour on silk  
 322.5 x 232 cm  
 The Palace Museum, Beijing

porcelains made in Jingdezhen for the emperors frequently included complex decorative schemes involving equally complex puns upon words. For example, 'Butterfly' (romanised as die, pronounced dee-eh) also represented 'longevity', since the character for an eighty-year-old was also pronounced die, and the character for 'doubling' (of happiness and fortune), also pronounced die, meant to 'redouble'.

Although many porcelains, produced under supervision in the imperial factories in Jingdezhen, were shipped fully glazed, many with plain glazes were further decorated in palace workshops where a fine range of enamels were applied. Jesuits, having achieved very little in the way of conversion to Catholicism, by the mid-eighteenth century had accepted that their role was to serve as handicraftsmen and artists to the court. They worked repairing and making clocks, painting, and making a wide variety of snuff-bottles. These tiny items, often used like the curly gnarled sticks or ruyi (which means 'may everything go as you wish') as official gifts, were made in a variety of materials. However, it is clear that glass, which had hardly been used in China before the Qianlong era, was particularly popular. The Qianlong emperor appointed two Jesuits to run the imperial glass workshop in the Yuanming yuan and they were soon sending home to Europe for chemicals to colour glass in new ways and supervising the enamelling of Western scenes on the tiny bottles.

**Cat. 109** Glass was hardly known in China until European Jesuits introduced its manufacture into the palace. This delicate glass snuff bottle was formed in the shape of a double gourd, an auspicious symbol of fertility, being full of seeds. The double gourd also represented a door through which certain people with miraculous powers could enter a parallel paradise. The decoration on the bottle includes bats, also auspicious symbols since the Chinese word for bat (fu) sounds like the word for 'happiness'.

One of the Qianlong emperor's particular interests was the development of the palace collection. In this he showed a mastery of Chinese culture, collecting ancient jades and bronzes and the best painting and calligraphy that could be found. Like the Yongzheng emperor before him, he had special boxes made for the new arrivals in his collection and, to the consternation of some critics, stamped personal seals and wrote appreciative colophons across ancient masterpieces of Chinese art. While he was only following the Chinese tradition by which each new owner of an ancient painting might append his seal and his words of appreciation, the Qianlong emperor did this in a characteristically grand style, his seals and calligraphy almost obliterating the original.

The Qianlong emperor embarked on a massive project to collect ancient literature. His plan, to collect 'the Complete Library

in Four Collections', was intended to preserve every important Chinese work written throughout its long history. There was a darker side to the project, since his emissaries used the opportunity to seek out seditious works, particularly those that criticised the Manchu. The authors of these works, and even their descendants, were savagely punished in one of the greatest literary inquisitions of all time. The finished work (on which 300 scholars and 3,800 scribes worked for ten years) resulted in 36,000 hand-written volumes of which seven copies were made for different imperial palaces.

The contributions of the three emperors to Chinese culture were considerable: porcelain production at Jingdezhen reached new heights, ancient treasures were gathered within the imperial palaces, and Chinese literature was preserved for posterity.

#### THE FOUR TREASURES

The painter and calligrapher had four basic tools: brush, inkstick, inkstone and paper, all of which were manufactured with the utmost care. Brushes were made from animal hair graded into a sharp point and glued into bamboo or reed holders. Ink was derived from soot and animal glue, cooked, pounded, hardened and matured in often elaborately decorated moulds. This ink stick, lasting for years, was highly prized by artists and calligraphers, who ground it themselves with water on a jade or slate inkstone, while meditating on the work ahead. Paper, invented in China long before anywhere else, was used both as a ground and as a backing to works on silk.

**Cat. 231** This low table belonged to the Qianlong emperor. The object that appears to be a book with ivory sides is really a box, holding the Yangzi-period rhyming dictionary. The objects you see spread out in front all fit cunningly in to the various carved boxes on top of the table. Lacquer was highly prized and extremely labour-intensive in its production.



**Cat. 109**  
Gourd-shaped snuff bottle with painted enamel design of flowers, gourds and bats  
Qianlong period 1736–95  
Glass and painted enamel  
6.4 x 3.2 cm  
The Palace Museum, Beijing

What modern Western technologically advanced equivalent can you think of for this writing table with its incredibly elegant design and almost fetishistic properties?

The Kangxi and Qianlong emperors made many trips to southern China, inspecting and learning, keeping local officials on their toes and imbibing some of the classic scenes of the south and its garden cities. They were relatively open to new ideas, making use of the skills, whether astronomical or artistic, of the Western Jesuits at the court. At the same time, many aspects of their Manchu heritage were also preserved. For example, empresses and concubines, ranked in a hierarchy that altered with the birth of imperial sons, were all selected from Manchu or Mongol families, never Chinese. As regards politics and religion, Qing tastes and interests still lay with northern and western neighbours. Despite the apparent splendour of late eighteenth-century China, Lord Macartney, who had led an unsuccessful British mission there hoping for freer trade and diplomacy, envisaged a perilous future after the death of the great Qianlong emperor.

The three emperors' successors were no match for the greed of the West for trade nor for the military might used to enforce it, and an unhappy nineteenth century followed the glorious, 'long' eighteenth century.

Cat. 231  
Writing set  
Qianlong period 1736–95  
Carved red lacquer, cloisonné enamel,  
ivory and other materials  
18,5 x 29 x 25,5 cm  
The Palace Museum, Beijing



## FURTHER READING

Evelyn Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions*, Berkeley, 1998.

Pamela Crossley, *The Manchus*, Oxford, 1997.

Jonathan Spence, *Emperor of China: Self-portrait of K'ang-hsi*, London, 1974.

Craig Clunas, *Art in China*, Oxford, 1997.

'The Empire of China is an old, crazy, First-rate man-of-war which a fortunate succession of able and vigilant officers has contrived to keep afloat for these one hundred and fifty years past and to overawe their neighbours merely by her bulk and appearance, but whenever an insufficient man happens to have command upon deck, adieu to the discipline and safety of the ship. She may perhaps not sink outright; she may drift some time as a wreck, and will then be dashed to pieces on the shore; but she can never be rebuilt on the old bottom.'

*An Embassy to China: Being the journal kept by Lord Macartney during his embassy to the Emperor Ch'ien-lung, 1794*