

The Qianlong Emperor's Perspective: Illusionistic Painting in Eighteenth-Century China

Under the patronage of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-1795), Chinese and European court artists innovated a new painting genre. Combining European *trompe-l'oeil* pictorial techniques with Chinese subjects and materials, these artists created life-size illusionistic paintings called *tongjing hua* 通景畫. These "paintings that connect scenes" offered powerful opportunities for the imperial viewer to hover between illusion and reality. But *tongjing hua* have received little study because they remain hidden inside restricted areas of the Forbidden City, and their style and format challenge traditional Chinese painting ideas.

Through intensive research in the imperial archives, original translations of Qianlong's poetry, and studies of related court paintings, the rediscovery of *tongjing hua* presents new insights into the Qianlong emperor, court painting practice, and the larger effects of Sino-European exchange on eighteenth-century Chinese art and visual culture. Individually, the extant *tongjing hua* express Qianlong's private thoughts and anxieties about family, identity, and legacy that are absent from his public persona. As a genre, however, *tongjing hua* not only externalize his inner landscape relative to his lifelong obsession with visual illusion, but also reflect eighteenth-century China's widespread fascination with European pictoriality. *Tongjing hua* therefore become the consummate illustrations of both the Qianlong emperor's perspective on his world and the changing visuality of late imperial China.

Chapter One provides the historical context for European pictoriality and illusionistic painting in China, emphasizing primary sources such as *The Study of Vision* (*Shixue* 視學). Chapter Two examines Qianlong's four inscribed double portraits *One or Two*, establishing his use of court painting to express his fascination with illusionism. Chapter Three presents the Forbidden City's *Juanqin Zhai* 倦勤齋 (Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service), the only extant complete *tongjing hua* program, to lay the conceptual foundations of the genre. Chapter Four analyzes the *Pictures of the European Palaces and Waterworks*, an album of engravings that is also a visual record of a lost *tongjing hua* depicting a European village. Chapter Five explores the unstudied *Qianlong Watching Peacocks in their Pride*, notable for its connections to Central Asian tribute relationships and a magical eremitic paradise. Chapter Six introduces a previously unpublished and unstudied *tongjing hua*, *Portrait of Qianlong's Consort with Yongyan as a Child*. The conclusion suggests future research related to *tongjing hua* and their connection to the general incorporation of European pictorial techniques into eighteenth-century Chinese art and visual culture.