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VITROCENTRE ROMONT

China and the West

Reconsidering Chinese Reverse Glass Painting

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Francine Giese (Ed.)

Volume 1

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Francine Giese,
Hans Bjarne Thomsen,
Elisa Ambrosio,
Alina Martimyanova
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PREFACE

Danielle Elisseeff

A brush and some ink to write or trace shapes on a soft support of silk or paper: these are the tools of the most prized arts in China, calligraphy and monochrome landscape painting. This sensitive but intellectual art, rejecting unnecessary emphasis, plays with suggestion and sobriety. Whether they practice the allusion, multiplying the scholarly references that the viewer is invited to decode, whether they express themselves in broad strokes strongly inked or on the contrary lightly inked and dry, Chinese literati painters categorically avoid or refuse the trompe l'œil. However, the art of "Chinese reverse glass painting," the importance and diversity of which this beautiful volume reveals, involves totally contrary choices.

Reverse glass painting uses vibrant colors that move the senses more than the brain and attracts in a parallel universe, almost "by force," whoever contemplates such a work: it takes the viewer inside the mirror, giving them the impression of being caught in a virtual space where light effects can sometimes make them believe that his or her image is fragmenting.

Nothing is, in principle, more contrary to the effects traditionally sought by artists and theorists of Chinese scholarly painting—the only art once practiced and venerated by the literati, these guardians of classical culture, and by anyone who prided himself on a minimum of education.

Nevertheless, mirrors painted with colorful and intricate scenes, which came from Europe in the eighteenth century, fascinated the privileged few Chinese who had access to them—the richest and the most famous of which is the emperor Qianlong.

The incredible circulation of mirrors then began, braving the fortunes of the sea, leaving Europe without any pictures on their surface, and being transported to China, where specialized painters added beautiful images to them. Then these mirrors were sent back to their starting point, animated with scenes painted according to the fashions, tastes, and orders of the very rich Europeans and Americans who could afford them. Against all expectations, these fragile pieces rarely disappeared into the waters,

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but rather arrived safely in the West, fueling a trade and a notable current of artistic exchanges.

By deeply exploring the history of reverse glass painting, this beautiful volume sheds a new and precise light on technical achievements and wonderfully highlights the complexity of the exchange and borrowing between East and West. It also explores and deciphers how a process of enriching life through hybridization takes place: we can no longer consider Chinese reverse glass painting a simple “decorative” episode in the Eurasian history of the arts; it is obviously an extraordinary process of invention through “hybridization.”

INTRODUCTION

Francine Giese, Hans Bjarne Thomsen, Elisa Ambrosio, and Alina Martimyanova

Most of the following contributions are based on a two-day workshop held in February 2020 at the Vitromusée Romont, the Swiss Museum of Stained Glass and Glass Art, to commemorate the exhibition *Reflets de Chine: Trois siècles de peinture sous verre chinoise*, one of the first exhibitions in the West that presented a major survey dedicated to Chinese reverse glass painting, tracing its long history, little known to date. Co-organized by the Vitrocentre Romont and the Section of East Asian Art History of the University of Zurich, the workshop brought together international specialists in the idyllic Swiss town of Romont to conduct a series of talks about reverse glass painting—and not only in China, but also in the neighboring Asian cultures. This highly successful and thought-provoking event gave rise to this publication, in which most workshop participants have taken part, in addition to several invited authors.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a flood of Chinese objects arriving to European ports. These were mostly made for export and were shipped through the southern port of Canton, where the foreign factories were located. Numerous workshops and factories worked nonstop to satisfy the wishes of the eager and rich European public. Ceramics, textiles, furniture, wallpaper, paintings and a bewildering range of other objects that fit into the Western concept of an "Exotic Other" were produced for export. The objects brought to the West, in particular paintings, have been subject of Western academic studies during the last decades, with key works being written by scholars such as Craig Clunas, Patrick Conner, and Carl Crossman.[1]

The reverse glass painting that forms the core of this volume have not been as fortunate. While they have been mentioned as sub-categories in texts dealing with types of export art, they have not been the subject of exclusive focus, with a few exceptions. It is clear that the study of Chinese reverse glass painting has lagged behind, with few academic studies in the West until the recent groundbreaking publication by Thierry Audric.[2] The fact remains that relatively few Western scholars have published on the

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subject, despite the important information that reverse glass painting carries, as will be seen in this volume.

Reverse glass painting is a clear case study of a globalized trade, crossing borders not only between China and the West, but also, as we will see in the following chapters, between various Asian countries. This transnational interchange of objects, techniques, and motifs is a clear example of early modern knowledge transfer across borders that challenges prevailing notions of purely national or regional perceptions of art.

As a matter of fact, reverse glass painting does not fit easily into the established canon of Chinese art and this aspect has long hindered research on the genre. With techniques and images that reflected aspects of both Western and East Asian traditions, the pejorative term "hybrid art" was often the response of specialists to an artistic manifestation that was somehow seen as being inferior to traditionl media such as ink painting. Moreover, it was often dismissed as merely decorative art, created in workshops by unknown artists. In the recent decades, important work on Chinese genre paintings, such as that by James Cahill[3] has helped to change the perception of such art, paving the way for a focus on other neglected fields, such as reverse glass painting. It would be a mistake to think of these works as forming a separate independent field, for as we will see in the following chapters, reverse glass painting is intently intermedial, with creative exchanges across a variety of media, such as woodblock prints, oil paintings, etchings, and so on. In fact, one could say that they are a part of a complexly interwoven transnational network of early modern art and that their exclusion would lead to an incomplete understanding of the field.

In order to understand reverse glass painting as an expression of artistic entanglement beyond geographic and cultural borders, we present a rich and multifaceted collection of essays, composed of seventeen contributions in which scholars deal with issues such as the materiality and transmediality of reverse glass painting, their regional reception within Asia, the mobility of artists and artifacts between China and the West, as well as the artistic transfer linked to this mobility. As a global phenomenon, the historical, political, and cultural conditions underlying these processes will be examined within five thematic sections.

The first chapter, Chinese Reverse Glass Painting and Its Materiality, offers a comprehensive selection of contributions dealing with this important aspect. Lihong Liu examines original Chinese documents in her insightful essay on early production processes, followed by Christopher L. Maxwell's contribution on the production and cultural significance of plate and reverse-painted glass in Georgian Britain. Kee Il Choi Jr. then takes us back to Asia, with his study of illusionistic practices in mid-eighteenth-century Canton, followed by William H. Ma's elucidating description of reverse glass painting at the Nguyễn Court.

The second chapter, Transfer and Transmediality, examines the complex processes of knowledge transfer between cultures and media, studied from several innovative angles. While Jan van Campen opens the section with a comprehensive analysis of the

collection of the Dutch-American merchant Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest (1739–1801), Karina Corrigan takes us to the United States for an examination of nineteenth-century receptions. The process of intermedial transfer between Chinese reverse glass painting and woodblock prints is then discussed by Alina Martimyanova. Elisabeth Eibner finishes this section with a curious case study of a Swiss painting that underwent numerous changes in media and meaning, including a remarkable previously undocumented Chinese reverse glass painting.

The third chapter, Contextual Studies of Reverse Glass Painting, opens the perspective for a differentiated view of the phenomenon. In her contribution, Jessica Lee Patterson examines the varieties of replication in Chinese reverse glass painting. She is followed by Patricia Ferguson, who examines the reception of Chinese reverse glass painting in Britain in the time peroid of 1738–1770, and Hans Bjarne Thomsen, who describes the traditions of Japanese reverse glass painting. Michaela Pejčochová then takes us to the Eastern part of Europe with her examination of Czech collections in the interwar period.

The fourth chapter, Regional Receptions of Reverse Glass Painting, looks at the spread of reverse glass painting across Asia, dealing with themes such as transcultural knowledge transfer. It starts with a paper by Patrick Conner on the images of Westerners in Chinese reverse glass painting, followed by Rosalien van der Poel, who examines early eighteenth-century examples in a Dutch collection. Jérôme Samuel then presents an insightful contribution that describes the reverse glass traditions in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Java.

The final chapter, Pioneering Research in Chinese Reverse Glass Painting, presents us with two essays by leading collectors of Chinese reverse glass painting who generously loaned their works for the Romont exhibition. Their contributions deepen our understanding of the history and techniques of the genre, starting with Thierry Audric, who provides a historical overview of the reverse glass painting in China. Rupprecht Mayer follows, providing insights gathered through a lifetime of interactions with the objects.

Through these insightful viewpoints we hope to cast light on a previously little studied topic that crosses numerous borders and media. The contributions in the volume will open up a number of possible angles from which reverse glass painting can be studied. It is our sincere hope that this will be the beginning of future explorations on these neglected objects and that we can look forward to future exhibitions, conferences, and scholarly publications.

1 Notable examples include Crossman 2004; Ten-Doesschate Chu/Milam 2019; Clunas 2017; Clunas/Thomas 1984; and Conner 2009.

2 A list of Western texts on Chinese reverse glass painting includes Audric 2020; Conner 2016; Cao 2019; Van Dongen 1996; Mehlman 1983; and Gao 2020.

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CHINESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTING AND ITS MATERIALITY

1

FROM VIRTUOSITY TO VERNACULARISM
REVERSALS OF GLASS PAINTING

Lihong Liu

Abstract

This study examines the transformation of reverse glass painting from an art of virtuosity to a vernacular form of art from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century during Sino-European encounters. The vernacularization of reverse glass painting, I argue, reflected a consumption-driven reinvention of certain literary stories and popular dramas that highlighted the common value of plate glass as a diaphanous spectatorial plane. By examining the correspondences among technique, medium, and genre, this essay assesses the correlation between materiality and visuality of clear plate glass that was used to support and spark theatrical views.

Keywords

Reverse glass painting, plate glass, mirror, vernacular art, Qing dynasty, China

The popularity of reverse glass painting in the early modern global circuits reflects a kinetic relationship between material medium and artistic form. At the onset, the availability of clear glass galvanized the making of reverse glass painting. In the 1450s, by using *allume catina* from plant ashes imported from the Levant, the Venetian glassmakers created a type of glass called *cristallo* with a greater degree of limpidness and transparency.[1] This kind of decolorized glass could make brighter mirrors when backed with tin-mercury, though still within a square meter in size. Venetian glass mirrors and vessels circulated in Europe and then in Asia as precious objects. Archives of the Dutch East India Company show that in 1608 Victor Sprinckel, the head of the Dutch trading post at Pattani, processed a shipment of 148 mirrors and 250 glass panels in exchange for a cargo of Chinese porcelain.[2] *Haicheng xianzhi* 海澄縣志 (*Gazetteer of Haicheng County*) records that in 1615, among other imported goods, there were *fanjing* 番鏡 ("foreign mirrors"), each of which had a tariff of one *fen* 分 and seven *li* 厘 silver, about two- to four-folds more expensive than the glassy vessels in the same entry. It also records that in 1633 the imported specialty goods there included

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bolijing 玻璃鏡 ("glass mirrors").[3] Haicheng County 海澄县 was established at Yuegang 月港, a known smuggling hub at the time, in Zhangzhou 漳州 in Fujian 福建 province in 1567 in order to legalize private overseas trade; it was later banned and eventually evacuated in 1660.[4] All those imports of glass mirrors to China took place before the first unembellished, large-sized glass mirrors were made in France in 1666—alongside the invention of large-scale plate glass, which subsequently entered the Chinese market through Canton toward the end of the seventeenth century.[5]

Emperors of the Qing 清 dynasty (1644–1911) favored European glass and mobilized a network of resources and personnel between the capital Beijing 北京 and the port cities for both importation and production. Canton had been a hub of long-distance trade, especially after the Kangxi 康熙 emperor's (r. 1662–1722) open-door trade policy was introduced in 1684.[6] In fact, numerous reverse glass paintings were made that showcased the quayside of Canton where commercial ships from Western countries stopped and where their headquarters were located. Their cargoes contained glass, which had been used to spearhead the promotion of Western goods and new technologies to the Chinese market. Those ships then went back to Europe loaded with objects produced in China, which since the 1730s included reverse glass painting.[7] Indeed, reverse glass painting not only represented global mobility, but also *materialized* it as it became a major type of export art from the last quarter of the eighteenth century onward.[8]

Subject Matter, Medium, Style

Called *boli beihua* 玻璃背畫 ("painting on the back of a glass sheet") or *jinghua* 鏡畫 ("mirror painting"), reverse glass painting included those painted both on the back of a glass panel and on the back of a glass mirror. A more general term *bolihua* 玻璃畫 encompasses all kinds of techniques, including paintings on both the verso and recto of sheet glass. Initially, making reverse glass painting on the back of a mirror was a method of fixing the flaws of the backing of the mirror. Artists scratched off the tin-mercury amalgam and filled the spot with pigments to depict mostly floral motifs. This method inspired artists to paint other subjects, such as portraits and landscapes, on the verso of glass mirrors. This method also became a stylistic choice when artists painted on transparent plate glass, by which artists would leave the painted area "floating" on the glass without filling in any background. When installed on windows or doors, the unpainted areas of the glass sheets allow light to shine through.

A newly discovered set of 103 reverse glass paintings from the Palace Museum, Beijing, includes pieces depicting bird-and-flower subjects using the method of the "floating" image, as seen in the painting of a lotus flower and leaves (fig. 1). In this painting, the lotus occupies roughly half of the surface of the glass while the "background" is left unpainted. A recent study by Zhang Shuxian and Xu Chaoying identifies this set of painted glass as being produced in the 1730s at the Qing court. Since 1740, the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1735–1796) held ceremonial receptions for Mongolian dignitaries celebrating New Year in the temporary yurts built in the Jianfu Palace Garden

1 *Lotus*, 1730s, reverse glass painting used for Mongolian Yurts, 31 × 23.5 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.

建福宮花園 in the Forbidden City. This set of painted glass sheets in uniform dimensions were installed in the windows and doors of the yurts for the ceremony and then dismantled to be stored for the next year's use. The ceremony lasted through the Jiaqing 嘉慶 reign (1796–1820). Zhang and Xu contend that the glass sheets were likely imported from Europe and were originally used in lanterns and then were polished and repainted for the yurts.[9] Through scientific analysis, they also point out that artists used traditional Chinese pigments (cinnabar, orpiment, ocher, azurite blue, and malachite green) and the Prussian blue—a synthetic pigment probably first made by the Swiss paint producer Johann Jacob Diesbach in Berlin around 1706.[10]

Most of these paintings were painted in traditional Chinese *gongbi* 工筆 (lit. "refined brushwork") style, with thin layers of pigments modulating gradations of the flower petals and feathers of the birds, and bright, clean, and subtle colors. Compared to earlier, more decorative floral motifs on mirrors, paintings from this set are compositionally self-contained as the artists treated the sheet glass as a bona fide painting substrate emulating traditional mediums of paper and silk. The artist's endeavor to emulate a Chinese painting style is also manifested in the empty spaces—from a method in the Chinese painting tradition called *liubai* 留白 ("leaving the white/void"). Those voids suggestively stand for elusive elements, such as the sky or the water. In this set, the artists also used the *liubai* method in paintings of architecture and landscapes, as seen in an example of *Pictures of Tilling and Waving* (hereafter, *Pictures*)

2 *Spinning in Silk* (left: recto; right: verso) in *Pictures of Waving and Tilling*, 1730s, reverse glass painting used for Mongolian Yurts, 31 × 23.5 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.

(fig. 2). From the back of the painting one can see that the artist only drew some lines as water waves on the lower-right corner, while leaving the sky in the upper part completely unpainted. Popular since the Southern Song 南宋 dynasty (1127–1279), the pictorial schemes of *Pictures* were revitalized since the Kangxi period, when the emperor ordered the court painter Jiao Bingzhen 焦秉貞 (1689–1726) to paint a series of 46 paintings under this theme and then had them printed in 1696. The proliferation of various versions points to the aim to symbolize courtly engagement with the two fundamental means of stately revenue and livelihood of people: agriculture and sericulture.[11] Jiao adopted a central perspective in his *Pictures* series, as he had worked together with the Jesuit missionaries at the Kangxi court. Thus, combining perspectival space with the Chinese *jiehua* 界畫 technique (lit. "painting by using a ruler" for depicting architectural spaces) and the refined *gongbi* style, Jiao made a new fashion in the Qing court atelier. In the set of glass paintings used in the Mongolian yurts, the theme of *Pictures* apparently adopted Jiao's version. But the artist transformed Jiao's square compositions into elongated vertical ones and consistently and deliberately defined the empty spaces of the water and sky—elements not obvious in Jiao's original version. In effect, these two elements resonate with glass with regards to the phenomena of light. The artistic tactic of *liubai* highlighted the property and functionality of the glass medium as those areas would allow light to come into the yurts more thoroughly and brighten the cozily enclosed space.

3 *Western Figures in Landscape*, 1730s, reverse glass painting used for Mongolian yurts, 31 × 23.5 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.

Yet, in treating the pictorial background, a stark contrast within this set appears when artists painted a Western subject and fully depicted the sky with pigments (fig. 3). This contrast reaffirms the tendency that artists aligned subject matter with medium and technique. This painting depicting a shepherd emulates the style of European oil painting. At the same time, the artist adjusted the subject matter by situating two European-type figures within a Chinese type of landscape indicated by the bamboo grove. The man in a straw hat is startled by a flock of flying birds (also a prominent Chinese painting subject since the Song dynasty), while a woman puts down two baskets of grass on a pole, about to feed the pig in front of her. On the far shore across the river, there are thatched huts in the fields, blue and brown mountains, and a multi-arched stone bridge. The mixture of a shepherd theme with lyrical scenery renders a pastoral view that could appeal to the courtly audience who were exposed to both Western exotica and Chinese antiques. Indeed, the whole set of glass paintings for the Mongolian yurts represents subjects popular at the court at that time, including archaic Chinese tales and figures, birds and flowers, landscapes, and European figures (in landscapes or not). Both the subjects and styles of this set show that in the early phase of making glass paintings, artists practiced a mode of medium translation. They used glass to emulate painting mediums relative to the subjects while making use of the unique properties of glass associated with its function in architectural spaces.

4 *Portrait of a Lady*, ca. 1770, reverse glass painting, 45.9 × 40.4 cm, Vitrocentre Romont, Collection R. & F. Ryser.

Technique and Trans-medium Emulation

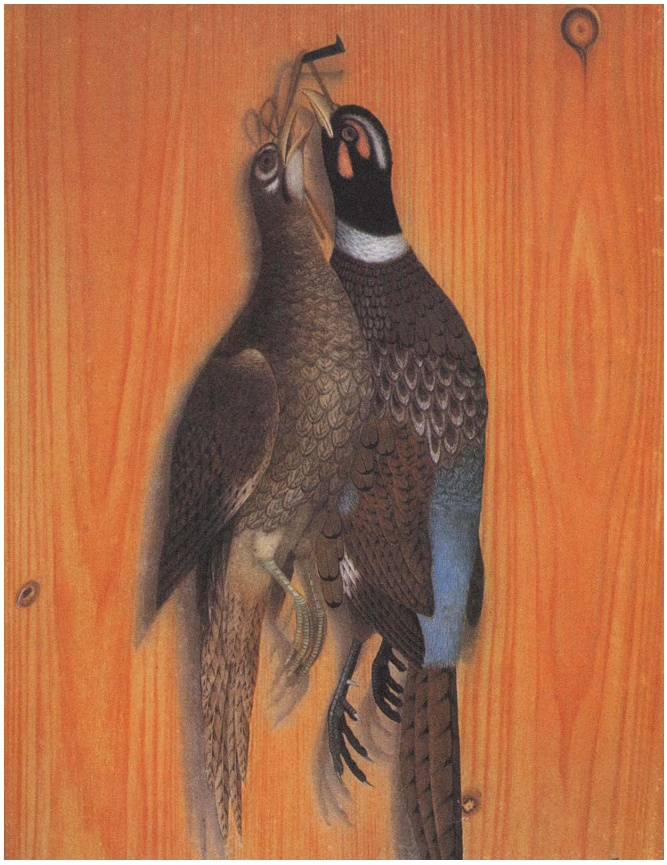
Among a variety of methods, artists most commonly painted on the "back" of the glass sheet through a reversed painting process: starting from the finishing touch and then adding layers around it in order to modulate the volume of the objects depicted. For example, in painting the fine portrait of an exquisitely adorned lady, the artist would have painted what is seen here as frontal items including the ring on her right hand, her hair decorations, and the embroidered patterns on her robe (fig. 4). For the face, the artist would have depicted her nose tip, eyebrows, eyes, and mouth before modulating her smooth skin tone with whitish opaque pigments. The embroidered patterns float a little on her pink garment, which reveals the technical difficulty in rendering details of the fabric over the folds in a reversed process. Nonetheless, this piece translates a refined *gongbi* style into reverse glass painting, a style that dictates the clarity of depiction and privileges patterns over drapery.

Thierry Audric has noted that another commonly used method at that time was to paint directly on the verso of a glass sheet (as if painting with watercolor pigments on a sheet of paper).[12] With this method, the artist would apply a thin layer of pigment as a finish all at once so that the image appears to be translucent when seen from the front. The sheen of the glass makes the image glisten, especially against a dark background. Still, either painting in a reversed process or in a direct process, artists would have

5 *Artist Transferring a European Print onto the Reverse of Glass*, from the series of *Cantonese Occupations*, ca. 1790, watercolor, 42 × 35 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

little chance to revise the image.[13] Thus, harnessing the medium and mastering the techniques were a tour de force.

The watercolor from the Victoria and Albert Museum collection shows a Cantonese artist copying a European print onto the reverse side of a glass plate (fig. 5). He sits still and holds his brush upright while concentrating on painting a spot, a view of which is blocked out by a flat board. To his right side the brushes of various sizes are laid out so that he can choose and change them when necessary. The scraps of paper on the table allow him to moderate the excess of diluted pigments on the brush. His concentration and preparedness reflect the process during which he needs to carefully compartmentalize the surface into small areas and finish those areas with minimal retouch in order not to muddle the image seen from the other side of the glass sheet. The mirrored composition of a European print has already been transposed onto the verso of the glass, but the print is still in front of him as a reminder of the holistic image as he focuses on painting the scoped area. The wooden frame of the glass delimits the entire composition while also elevating the glass plate and protecting the painted surface.[14] These methods of spacing and scoping the painting surface enable the artist to maneuver between details and the entirety of the image, which in turn helps to produce a coherent image in reverse.



6 *Pair of Pheasants*, 1770–1780, reverse glass painting, 45.8 × 35.6 cm, Vitrocentre Romont, Collection R. & F. Ryser.

Achieving illusionistic representation of perspectival space with realistic depiction became the most challenging task. Reverse glass painting made in Canton from the 1770s to the 1810s exercised a conspicuous approach to the illusionistic style that was in vogue at the Qing court as well as in local workshops.[15] Artists would utilize one-point perspective to depict a distinctively continuous spatial recession and use multi-layered modulation of pigments to highlight the volume of objects as if they appear in a three-dimensional space. Beside spatial illusion, there was also material illusion. Artists were acutely aware of the materiality of glass as a transparent substrate so that some of them attempted to visually transubstantiate the glass surface into the appearance of other materials. An example found in the collection in Romont painted by a Cantonese artist in the 1780s shows a trompe l'œil of two birds hung on a wooden panel, completely transforming the glass into the look of the wood, i.e., the surface mimics the natural patterning and knotting of the section of the wood (fig. 6). Trans-medium representation was popular at that time precisely because artists enjoyed showcasing their virtuosic skills that could overcome the material properties of one medium by visually transforming it into another with a compelling material effect of the latter. Those works bewilder the viewer with enthralling effects of meta-materiality. In this case, it is the transparent and metamorphosing glass—which tends to optically negate

7 *Three Lady Musicians*, ca. 1750–1780. Reverse glass painting, 77.7 × 52.3 × 3.5 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

itself—that affords the possibility of an utter conversion of the surface into presenting the woodiness of the represented wooden panel. This painting also grants an illusion of spatial inversion, as this image painted in reverse confronts the viewer with a stunning effect where the birds intrude into the viewer's space. The artist used projected shadows to accentuate this relief effect. As a result, the flat wooden panel appears to support the outward projection of the birds and of the nail on which they hang, and, in turn, this effect inverts the supposed pictorial space featuring a recession into the distance. Both the meta-materiality of the panel and the lifelikeness of the birds induce the viewer to believe that the panel and the birds are present within the surface-space rather than being represented from behind the surface.

Performativity of Medium in and as Space

Artists creating reverse glass paintings also highlighted the performativity of glass as a material medium in living spaces. Numerous glass paintings present a meta-representation of illusionistic spaces that reflect the actual dwellings and structures in which glass would have been installed, such as windows and verandas. *Three Lady Musicians* presents a veranda space as if it is seen through a glass window (fig. 7). On

the veranda, three women are performing as a small orchestra around a couch/bed placed against a large-sized standing mirror. The mirror represented here is also a real mirror. It stands for an opening of the scene, as it echoes the veranda's open space: both areas are backed with tin-mercury to make a mirroring extension of the already virtual space of the perspectival image. Simultaneously, the entire painting itself represents an opening of the space occupied by the viewer, with a spatial projection manifested by the orthogonal lines of the gridded ground and the wooden lintels and columns that constitute the vista. The two boys in the foreground serve as the intermediary between the performers and the audience; they participate in the performance, while being the outliers of the orchestra. Their positions are in alignment with the performers and the mirror in the back along a diagonal axis, which indicates that the two boys, if they stood up, could see the *mise en abyme* of the performance in the mirror. But they are sitting on the ground, giving way for the audience to imagine that they could see the performance in the mirror. In reality, by looking into the mirror the viewer, as the virtual audience of the performance, would have seen their own image in the mirror, instantly becoming the inner spectator of the scene. All these intrigues of this painting show that glass as a medium not only supports the painted scene, but also enlivens it by instigating a participatory spectatorial experience.

In real theater space, glass enhanced the audience's interactive mode during performances. The famous scholar-official Gao Shiqi 高士奇 (1644–1703) wrote about how the Kangxi emperor ordered the installation of glass windows around the imperial theater in the Yuanming Yuan Garden (*Yuanming Yuan* 圓明園):

> turning to the theater space, a high platform arises in splendor; surrounding it are buildings on the four sides, all installed with glass panes. The emperor asked us to view the Western paintings on the walls.[16]

Gao's text indicates that the audience could potentially watch the performance from inside through the glass windows. Thus, it is plausible that *Three Lady Musicians* not only *represented* performances, but also *presented* the experience of watching the performances in a real space.

Suffice it to say that glass painting presents itself as a spectatorial plane that allows viewers to see their own actions and surroundings within the scene they view. The scene is contingent and situational, which can be variably instantiated each time by the viewer's act of looking. A comparison of a reverse glass painting reproduced on paper and the same painting exhibited in the gallery shows how the painting appears differently in a real space. This pictorial scene, painted by the glass artist Li Yunting 李雲亭 during the early twentieth century, depicts a story from the famous novella collection *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (*Strange Stories from a Studio for Leisurely Conversations*) written by Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715) and published in 1740 (fig. 8). The scene depicts the opening of the story in which a certain Mr. Wang Shao'an 王少安 meets Madame Zhang Cui'e 張翠娥 on the boat at the shore and he presents her a bracelet. Because the glass painting is also a mirror, when I tried to take a photo of it my reflection appeared in the photo, and all the background in the current image is a

reflection of the gallery's interior surroundings. When the viewer approaches the painting, the image appears to be in constant change, as if the performance is live, and the viewer becomes part of the scene, while the sparkling surface is instantiated into a motional space.

The Popular Material and the Vernacular Genre

Theatrical views of operatic performances became a predominant subject of reverse glass painting in the early twentieth century. Indeed, from about the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, reverse glass painting underwent a process of transformation in terms of subject matter and technique as well as its intended audiences in China. Numerous glass paintings produced in local workshops began to depict popular stories and dramas.[17] On the one hand, this change coincided with the increased popularization of operatic performances during this period. On the other hand, this phenomenon reflected the change of status of plate glass from a rare and exotic good to an everyday but still mesmerizing (if not magical) material. The vernacularization of reverse glass painting since the second half of the nineteenth century was instigated by the industrial production of glass and the modernizing discourse of glass as a ubiquitous material.[18] Artists adopted this fashionable medium to depict adaptations of famous literary subjects for a public that was actively consuming arts and culture in their communities.

The vernacular genre of glass paintings highlighted literary themes, didactic tales, folkloric and religious subjects. These subjects reinvented a sense of "tradition" in an accessible manner, catering to consumers across social strata. Glass artists also embraced a technical reinvention of the traditional *gongbi* style with a more vibrant color palette. They often depicted a shallow space of the performing scene or staged figures in dramatic garments.

The literary historian David Rolston has observed that since the late Qing period woodblock and lithographic prints began to present elements specific to stage practice, differing from earlier times when illustrations of plays were indistinguishable from those of novels.[19] I see this fashion ensue in glass paintings. In the early twentieth century, both the medium (plate glass) and the art (reverse glass painting) embodied a sense of contemporaneity to the living and performance cultures at that time, especially in northern China. The story from the abovementioned glass painting (fig. 8) by Li Yunting had been adapted into the Ping Opera, with the title *Shao'an ganchuan* 少安赶船 (*Shao'an Catching Up the Boat*), which was debuted in Tangshan 唐山, Hebei 河北 province in 1914. Li Yunting was a renowned glass painter in that region, and he rendered in this painting a scene consisting of stage elements such as the high-soled boots and the long sleeves of the male protagonist and the fan at his right hand. Li also added the title of the play *Shao'an ganchuan* to the right corner of the painting, followed by his name in a seal impression. By presenting the operatic adaptation of the old novella on a glass mirror, Li promoted the performance by inviting his viewers

8 *Shao'an Catching Up the Boat* (upper: reproduction in print; lower: photo taken in gallery by author), early twentieth century, reverse glass painting, 40 × 59.7 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

(presumably also theater goers) to reenchant their spectatorship; the viewers would see the newly popularized opera streamed on the fashionable glass painting. In this process, viewers' acts of looking bring the scene into life anew through their self-imaginings of their spectatorial engagements with contingent surroundings.

A series of panel paintings displays eight stories from *Liaozhai zhiyi*, in which the artist divided each panel into two compositions by depicting a band of clouds hovering above the roof of the veranda below—a strategy of pictorial division drawn from traditional woodblock illustrations (fig. 9). Across all the four panels, the lower halves all display operatic performances of four stories taking place in verandas—typical spaces

9 Scenes from *Liaozhai zhiyi*, early twentieth century, reverse glass painting, each panel 88.8×20 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

for performances. The upper halves of the panels all depict stories related to rivers, so they appear to be in a narrative-in-landscape mode. The contrast between the narrative mode and the theatrical mode marks the distinction of genres (storytelling and staging), which the glass painter was aware of when juxtaposing them within each one of the panels.

More often, though, glass painters chose to depict those stories in staged performances. As Peking Opera rapidly developed during the second quarter of the twentieth century, its performances also became subjects of reverse glass painting at that time. The glass painter Liu Yulin 劉玉麟 (active 1930s) of Hebei province painted numerous scenes of this kind. For example, *The Poet's Vengeance* depicts the drunken poet Li Bai 李白 (701–762) writing a reply to a letter sent to the Tang court by an envoy from the Balhae kingdom in Manchuria (fig. 10). Because Li Bai was the only person who could decipher the letter, he used his erudition and the favoritism toward him from Emperor Xianzong of Tang 唐玄宗 (r. 713–756) to take revenge on the courtier Yang Guozhong 楊國忠 and the eunuch Gao Lishi 高力士 who had slighted Li. In this scene, Li demands that Gao takes his boots off, while he points to Yang with the brush. Meanwhile, Yang's sister, the emperor's consort Guifei 貴妃 (719–756) holds the inkstone for Li. In this painting, Li Bai is presented as a hero who "shuttered the guts of the foreign

10 Liu Yulin, *The Poet's Vengeance*, ca. 1930, reverse glass painting, 33 × 48.6 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

states and whose letter, once dispatched, should appease the whole world,"[20] as noted by the artist's own inscription. Liu Yulin signed this fine work: the characters of his signature are as big as the inscription, and he endorsed his authorship by adding a red seal impression of his name. Liu's calligraphic signature and seal imbued the painting with a cultural exaltation, which is reinforced by his use of a traditional *gongbi* style, seen in the linear depiction and subtle modulation of the curtains as well as in the scrupulous rendition of the actors' garments and faces. The structure of the table defies orthogonal projection that we have seen in earlier illusionistic paintings, instead it retains an archaic spatial mode typical for traditional *gongbi* paintings, by which the viewer's eye or bodily position was often implied as the converging point of spatial projection. Both the operatic reinvention of the story and the artist's return to an older artistic tradition may have reverberated with the nationalistic cultural fortes at that time, when the country faced a tumultuous era of national and international conflicts—a hypothesis that deserves more study.

The fact that during the early twentieth century famous glass painters like Liu Yulin and Li Yunting signed their works on the painting surfaces also suggests commercial branding at that time. Signatures branded their glass paintings as much as famous operatic scenes depicted by them hallmarked their workshops. Indeed, scenes like *The Poet's Vengeance* prevailed among different workshops, indicating market demand. The presence of different versions of paintings on this theme reflects the wide reception of the operatic genre in reverse glass painting across communities. The same subject also became popular in New Year's prints (*nianhua* 年畫). *Nianhua* emerged as a more affordable medium in vernacular spaces and bore efficacious images that were considered empowering and auspicious.[21] The shared subjects and

image schemes between glass painting and *nianhua* show the ultimate vernacularization of glass and glass painting.

Conclusion

The presence and popularization of reverse glass painting in China from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century demonstrates various creative ways of engaging with clear plate glass as a material medium in global exchange as well as in domestic consumption. During this process, generally speaking, there was a gradual shift from showcasing the effects of the medium to showing the expression of the genre. In the beginning, artists' virtuosic mastery of illusionism in reverse glass painting correlated with the novel optical intrigue of using clear plate glass in architectural and theatrical spaces, which highlighted glass as a spectatorial plane evoking performative scenes. Since the late nineteenth century, as glass became increasingly ubiquitous, reverse glass painting involved contemporaneous cultural consumption and predominantly presented vernacular subjects. Growing from glass's theatrical visuality, the depiction of operatic elements or stages became in vogue: both the subject and the style reinvented literary and artistic traditions upon the common reception of the creative whimsies of the newly popularized material medium.

1 The author dedicates this essay to Rupprecht Mayer and Lin Haitang in admiration of their enthusiasm in collecting reverse glass painting and sharing their sources and insights. Turner 1999.
2 Flecker 2008.
3 Cai 1633.
4 Wu 2020.
5 Scoville 1942.
6 Connor 2009.
7 Audric 2020, 17.
8 Haicheng served as the only official port for merchants sailing from and to Manila, where Chinese goods were shipped to the New World and Americas and where Spanish and Portuguese ships arrived. For the subjects of export glass painting, see Crossman 1991.
9 Zhang/Xu 2020
10 Bartoll 2008.
11 For a discussion on the political significance of this theme, see Hammers 2011.
12 Audric 2020, 106.
13 The third method was to scratch from a darker background with a stylus. But those methods can be mixed. For a variety of techniques across periods see Ryser 1992.
14 For a detailed discussion about the framing and representation of the frame, see Crossman 1991, 208.
15 For a study on illusionistic paintings in the Qing court, see Kleutghen 2014.
16 轉入觀劇處,高臺宏麗, 四周皆樓, 設玻璃窗。上指示壁間西洋畫令觀. From Gao 1703.
17 For a good number of examples on these subjects, see Mayer 2017.
18 Liu 2017.
19 I thank David Rolston for underscoring this point to me and for sharing with me his unpublished manuscript.
20 "番邦驚破膽, 書頒萬國安" in the original inscription.
21 See Alina Martimyanova's study in this volume.

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2

PEOPLE IN GLASS HOUSES
THE POLITE AND POLISHED IN GEORGIAN BRITAIN

Christopher L. Maxwell

Abstract

This essay seeks to consider the cultural significance of plate glass during the "age of politeness" and understand why reverse-painted plate glass, and especially that decorated in China, experienced a surge of popularity within prosperous and fashion-conscious households in Britain during the second half of the eighteenth century. Given the variety and sophistication of newly available materials embraced by the British elite, it is perhaps surprising that the historic, European tradition of reverse-painted glass should have gained prestige among them. Such prejudice, however, largely derives from the more recent misrepresentation of the technique as more closely associated with the folk or amateur traditions of which it had become part by the nineteenth century. This negative perception entirely neglects the prestige of one of the eighteenth-century's greatest technical and culturally representative accomplishments: plate glass.

Keywords

Reverse-painted glass, plate, politeness, eighteenth century, "chinoiserie", Britain, China

From its origins within the Roman Empire during the 3rd or 4th century CE, the technique of reverse painting on glass evolved into numerous types and, by the medieval period, its various manifestations enjoyed prestige throughout Europe, particularly in the territories of modern-day Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.[1] It was probably in the late seventeenth century that European reverse-painted mirrors, and the attendant techniques, reached China.[2] Although the production of plate glass (both clear and mirrored) in China during the eighteenth century remained limited, by the middle of the century not only was reverse painting on glass well established at the Imperial Court in Beijing, but Chinese painters had mastered the technique to such a degree that their work on imported mirror glass had not only generated a market in China, but it was also in high demand back in Europe, and particularly in Britain (fig. 1).[3]

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110711776-004

1 Pair of reverse-painted mirrors, painted in Canton, about 1750–1800, 83 × 54.5 cm, The Corning Museum of Glass, 2019.6.15.

While the mania among Britain's privileged classes for Chinese export products, including tea, porcelain, lacquer, silk, and wallpaper doubtlessly bolstered the demand for the Chinese or "chinoiserie" iconography of Chinese reverse-painted glass, it must be remembered that neither glass painting nor plate glass production were indigenously Chinese. While plate glass also enjoyed a degree of popularity in China, as windows and as an artistic medium, following its introduction by the Europeans, Chinese glasshouses could not match the demand, especially for mirrors, and so British East India ships set sail for Asia with unlikely cargoes of fragile plate glass. In 1802, plate glass exports to China peaked at around 100 tons.[4] Assuming this figure also includes the weight of the crates in which the plate glass was packed, it is still possible to estimate more than 30,000 sheets of glass measuring 50 × 50 cm. Of course, not all plate glass was reverse painted or reimported. However, the journey from Britain to Canton, through the artists' studio, and back to Britain would have taken about two years. Yet given all the risks of breakage, it was evidently still considered desirable among the British elite to pay the inevitable premium for such a panel of Chinese reverse painted glass, and a worthwhile endeavor for the supra-cargoes who carried

them as part of their private allowance. From this, I would argue, it must have been an appreciation for the material itself as much as the scenes that were painted onto it that drove this market.

In order to fully understand this privileged status, it is useful to set Chinese reverse-painted glass within the broader context of the elite consumption of plate glass during this period.

The Prestige of Plate Glass

Transparencies constitute one notable category for comparison. A transparency was a painted, drawn, or printed scene applied to a light-transmitting substrate, such as glass (although paper and textile were also commonly used). The effect of day- or candlelight passing through the image illuminated the scene for the enjoyment of its viewers.[5] The genre enjoyed significant popularity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Initially, at least, transparencies were produced by the most accomplished artists of the day and were a noted feature of London's growing exhibition culture.

Among the most celebrated painters of glass transparencies were James and Eglington Margaret Pearson (d. 1823).[6] Their work evidently appealed to the most exclusive markets; not only did James Pearson style himself "Painter to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales," but his painted glass productions also included life-size copies of well-known portraits of both George III (r. 1760–1820) and the Prince of Wales (1762–1830). Eglington Margaret Pearson also seems to have found royal favor, receiving permission to copy Raphael's cartoons from the originals at Windsor Castle.[7]

One of the most famous images reproduced by Eglington Margaret Pearson was *L'Aurora* by Guido Reni (fig. 2).[8] The panel appears to have been sold in 1795 to Charles Howard, 11th Duke of Norfolk, for approximately £60.[9] The price for this small panel was roughly equivalent to the cost of commissioning a head from England's leading portraitist, Joshua Reynolds, or about half the cost of a full-length portrait by Thomas Gainsborough.[10]

By the end of the eighteenth century, the production of transparencies had moved from the artist's studio to the domestic drawing room. In 1815, James Northcote, R.A., recalled that "exhibitions of transparencies were at the time quite a novelty … in addition to which, this was the joint work of the first painters in the kingdom," but they had latterly "become so common, that they are little thought of, and commonly very indifferently executed."[11] Painting transparencies on paper or textiles had become a fashionable pastime for (predominantly) female amateurs and was promoted in numerous publications, such as *Ackermann's Repository*, and in Edward Orme's *An Essay on Transparent Prints and on Transparencies in General*, which included both designs and advice on their execution. The eventual popularity of amateur transparencies belies earlier makers' deep knowledge of glass and firing technology, as well as their considerable artistic skill and experience.

2 Copy of Guido Reni's L'Aurora, Eglington Margaret Pearson (signed), London, 1793, enamels on glass, 45.5×91.5 cm, The Corning Museum of Glass, 2016.3.7.

"Glass pictures" were another form of art associated with plate glass. They too, however, followed the route of glass transparencies into the realm of domestic production. They arose from the growing popularity of the mezzotint engraving in the late seventeenth century.[12] The production of these pictures entailed soaking a mezzotint print in water, then laying it face down on a sheet of glass prepared with turpentine, before wiping away the saturated paper to leave behind the printed design, which could then be "painted-in" from the reverse with colored varnish. The financial outlay involved in their early production was significant. Suitable mezzotints cost between one shilling and four shillings (approximately the weekly salary of an unskilled laborer), and often more for larger or more limited prints. Added to that were the costs of the varnishes. The most expensive, such as ultramarine, cost several pounds.[13] Good quality plate glass was vital and added significantly to the costs. One early guide to the production of glass pictures specified that the

> glass ought to be thin, white and well polisht, such as is made for Looking-glasses. All blewish, red, green, and window glass, cannot be allowed of here. You must altogether despise it; for if you paint on either of these, especially window glass, your colours will never appear fair or beautiful.[14]

Returning to Chinese reverse-painted glass, while the Chinese graphic arts and their "chinoiserie" counterparts were available to elite British consumers in a variety of materials, from wallpaper to porcelain, the demand for Chinese reverse-painted glass remained strong during the final decades of the eighteenth century as part of a well-established appreciation for the material qualities of plate glass among elite consumers. So much, then, for the evident desirability and prestige of plate glass, but the question still remains: Why? To understand the cultural significance of this material, we need to consider the associations of the polished surface and how it manifested itself in both the physical and psychological lives of the elite world of the eighteenth century.

3 Arthur Devis, William and Lucy Atherton, about 1744, oil on canvas, 92.1 × 127 cm, Walker Art Gallery Liverpool, WAG 1353.

Polished and Polite

In the early 1740s, William Atherton (born ca. 1715), a wealthy woolen draper in Preston, and his wife, Lucy, were painted by the artist Arthur Devis (1712–1787). The couple's portrait, a genre known as a conversation piece, is a sober yet confident statement of their economic success and social standing (fig. 3). They gaze out toward the viewer, their faces devoid of any expression that might distract attention from the manner and setting in which they have chosen to be presented.

To modern eyes, the Athertons's lack of psychological depth might seem a failing on the part of the artist, but to an eighteenth-century viewer this was a representation of self-mastery that indicated the couple's familiarity with contemporary codes of politeness. The word "polite" originates from the Latin *politus*, meaning "smooth" or "polished." It was defined in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* as meaning "1. Glossy, smooth. 2. Elegant of manners."[15] Consequently, "polite" and "polished" were widely deployed and often synonymous in the language of civility that prevailed in eighteenth-century Britain.[16]

The Athertons are not inert, but rather signal their self-conscious receptiveness to reflect the *bon ton* of polite interaction. They are presented as highly polished individ-

uals whose external appearance and demeanor reveal nothing of roughness, irregularity, or individuality. Their psychological *possession* is every bit as indicative of their politeness as their material *possessions*.

The notion that carefully selected material possessions could (and should) express moral and social virtue was widely disseminated. One of the most influential and prolific writers to this end was Anthony Ashley-Cooper (1671–1713), 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury believed that "the Accomplishment of Breeding is, to learn whatever is decent in Company, or beautiful in Arts."[17] Polite sensibility could therefore be unequivocally expressed through aesthetic judgment and material possessions.

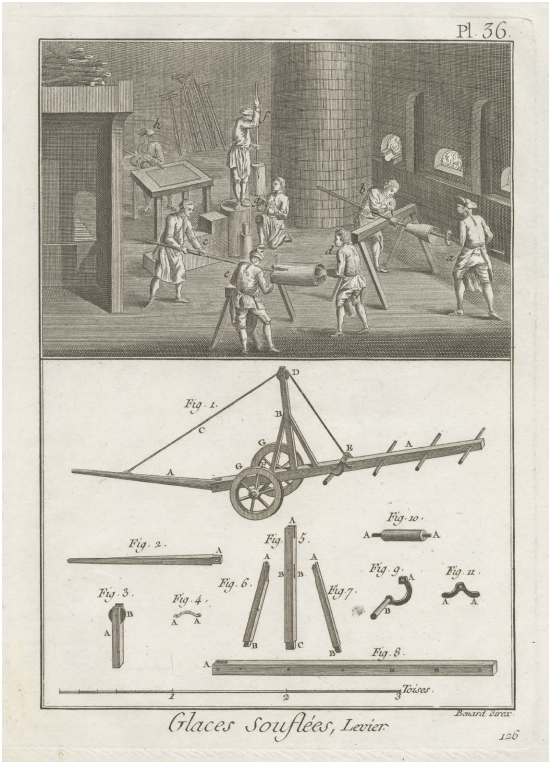
In 1784, the Comte de La Rochefoucauld (1765–1848), visiting from France, observed of the English that "their tables are made of the most beautiful wood and always have a brilliant polish like that of the finest glass."[18] The gaudiness that is often associated with these finishes today was not linked to them in the eighteenth century; "gaudy" was more often associated with an excess of ornament or color. Smooth, gleaming surfaces, whether they transmitted, reflected, or refracted light, became associated with the artificial simplicity, complaisance, and cleanliness that constituted the ideals of polite culture. As the novelist and diarist Fanny Burney joked, "The present Ton is refinement; – nothing is to be, that has been; all things are to be new polished, and highly finished."[19] We might conclude that the "polite" surface was the polished or reflective surface.

Making Plate Glass

Large sash windows are a common motif in conversation pieces. While they undoubtedly functioned to signify the realm of the domestic interior, they can, like the carefully selected objects with polished or reflective surfaces set before them, be considered polite accoutrements.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the vertically sliding sash window had been established as a staple of British architecture. In 1756, the architect Isaac Ware (1704–1766) confirmed the prevailing architectural ideals by recommending that "as much glass should be seen, and as nearly a continued body as possible."[20] The ability to achieve this depended, of course, on the availability of suitable plate glass.

The English glass industry had been steadily growing since the end of the seventeenth century. In the second edition of Richard Neve's *The City and Country Purchaser and Builder's Dictionary*, published in 1726, the author lists ten types of glass "which Glaziers commonly work upon here in England."[21] Of these, Newcastle broad glass, made according to the cylinder method (fig. 4), was considered "most in use in England," but had the disadvantage of being "subject to specks and streaks and very often warped and crooked." These defects rendered it far from satisfactory for use in the larger panes required for fashionable sash windows. For these, London crown glass was considered to be the "best and clearest" and was available to the trade for about twice the cost of broad glass (fig. 5).



4 Diderot, making plate glass by the cylinder method, Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts méchaniques, avec leur explication. Manufacture des glaces, 1765, vol. 4, pl. 36. Collection of the Rakow Research Library, The Corning Museum of Glass.

5 Diderot, making plate glass by the crown method, Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts méchaniques, avec leur explication. Manufacture des glaces, 1772, vol. 10, pl. 2. Collection of the Rakow Research Library, The Corning Museum of Glass.

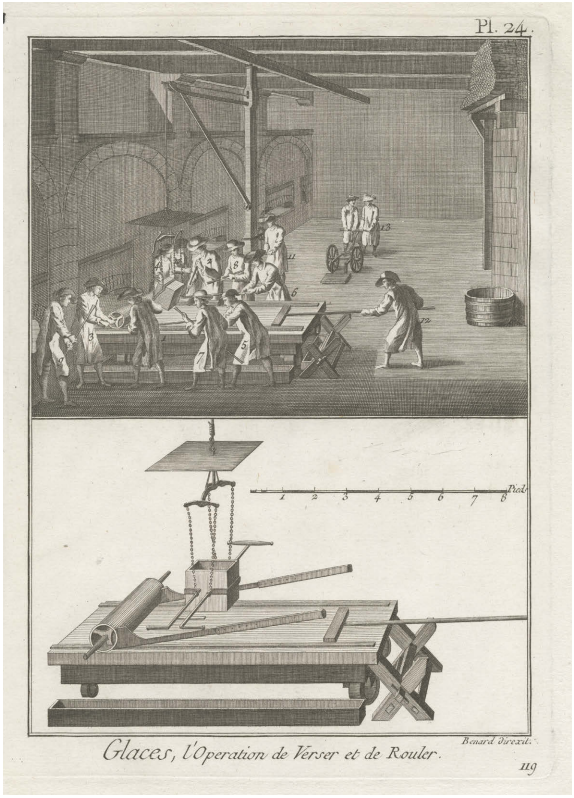
According to Neve, the crown glass technique had been introduced to Britain from France in the seventeenth century, and its manufacture grew in close proportion to the increasing use of sash windows during the building boom of the early eighteenth century. Around the time the Athertons were painted by Devis, the wholesale cost of crown glass for sashes was between seven pence and twelve pence per foot. The tax levied on glasshouses from 1745 raised prices further, and the price of the best crown glass doubled again by the late 1780s.[22]

An even more extravagant type of glass was cast plate glass, which was "ground smooth and flat, and polished." It was "sometimes used in sashes or sash windows," but it was considered "a dear sort of glass" costing twice as much as crown, rendering it more suitable for use as mirror glass. This significant difference in cost quickly reveals the prestige of the large sash windows depicted, or suggested, in many conversation pieces. It is easy to understand why the Athertons would have specified a large sash window with a clear view when composing their fictional and aspirational interior with Devis.

The Relative Costs of Plate Glass

In the context of polite material culture, whether used in windows, looking glasses, transparencies, or glass pictures, the cost of good-quality glass was significant. In order to more fully appreciate the relative value of this material, we might consider that a middling family of five with two servants and an annual income of £200, enjoyed about £16 discretionary spending per year.[23] Those with such an income, or greater, probably made up no more that 3–5% of the population. A garniture of blue-and-white Chinese porcelain vases, such as those placed on the mahogany cabinet in the corner of the Athertons's drawing room, might have cost over £3.[24] A round mahogany tea table could be purchased for between £1 and £2.[25] The gilded and upholstered chairs and stools might have cost as much as £4 each, and the sofa over twice that amount.[26] The lutestring for Lucy Atherton's gown might have cost between £2 and £3.[27] The paintings above the chimney piece and door might have been had for around £2 each, assuming the artist was not of the highest renown.[28] The eighteen-pane sash window, with its clear views onto the imagined parkland beyond, could well have cost upward of £5.[29] A good-quality looking glass might have cost in excess of £100.[30] Therefore, as a manifestation of prevailing polite architectural taste, an embodiment of the most modern manufacturing achievements, and a representation of significant financial investment, plate glass might well be considered one of the politest signifiers in an interior.

Perhaps the most astonishing use of plate glass in Britain during the eighteenth century was the Glass Drawing Room, designed and completed by Robert Adam (1728–1792) in 1775 for the 1st Duke (1714–1786) and Duchess (1716–1776) of Northumberland at their London residence, Northumberland House. The duke and duchess were among the most celebrated of London's *beau monde*. In the early 1770s, they

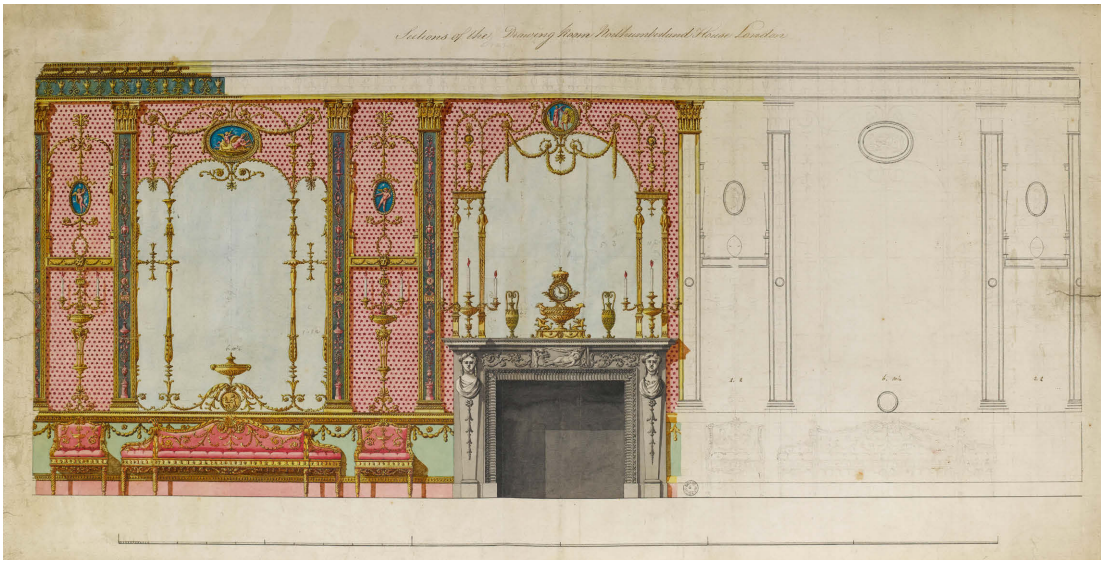


6 Diderot, casting plate glass, Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts méchaniques, avec leur explication. Manufacture des glaces, 1765, vol. 4, pl. 24. Collection of the Rakow Research Library, The Corning Museum of Glass.

embarked on a project with Adam to design an appropriately polished backdrop for their splendid entertaining.[31] The room measured thirty-three feet by twenty-two feet and incorporated eight large cast pier glasses set against walls entirely clad between dado and architrave with red and green reverse-foiled and spangled glass panels, overlaid with gilded metal ornament (fig. 6).

The casting technique involved pouring molten glass onto a large metal table with shallow sides and rolling the glass out evenly, using a huge copper rolling pin (fig. 7). Although the technique had been developed in France before 1687, it was not sustainably mastered in Britain until over a century later; until then, the blown cylinder method was most used for large-scale plates. The chief advantage to the casting technique was the ability to produce plates of significantly larger dimensions. The duke's cast plate glass mirrors were ordered from the French royal factory of Saint-Gobain, in Picardy, France. They cost a staggering £1,465, to which was added a further 75% import tax.[32]

This consuming *vogue* for mirrors in the fashionable interiors of "the smart beaux and belles" was remarked upon by Mrs. Delany, who scoffed at their preoccupation with "china, japan, Indian paper, and looking glasses."[33] Her observations are borne out in the pastel portrait of John, Lord Mountstuart (1744–1814), later 4th Earl and 1st Marquess of Bute, by the Swiss painter Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702–1789). Here, the famously vain young aristocrat stands beside a folding screen covered with "Indian



7 Robert Adam, Design for the chimney wall of the drawing room at Northumberland House, 1770–1773, Pen, pencil and colored washes on laid paper, 52.2 × 101.9 cm, Sir John Soane's Museum, SM Adam, volume 39/6.

paper," and leans elegantly against a chimney piece, above which hangs a large looking glass in a gilded trumeau frame (fig. 8). Indeed, what more complete embodiment of all these fashions than Chinese reverse-painted mirrors?

Coda

Studies of the material culture of this period have rarely taken a holistic approach to considering plate glass as an expensive, modern, and desirable material. This essay endeavors to correct this imbalance and to suggest that, far from mundane and utilitarian, the best-quality plate glass drew considerable admiration from its contemporaries.[34] Like porcelain, mahogany, lacquer, and silk, as well as other materials more often associated with patterns of elite consumption in the eighteenth century, plate glass was integral to the carefully crafted arenas in which the prescribed and nuanced rituals of sociability were played out, and the rise of polite culture in Britain imbued the "glassy" surface with a particular significance.

With regards to Chinese reverse-painted glass, that the value of these objects lay in the material itself as much as the artistic production of a distant culture is borne out by comparisons in price between reverse-painted mirrors (inevitably of moderate scale for ease of transportation) and another iconic manifestation of Chinese export graphic art: wallpaper. In her chapter in this book, Patricia Ferguson notes the auction values of Chinese reverse-painted glass sold in London. The price of a pair of reverse-painted mirrors could easily match the cost of purchasing and covering an entire room with Chinese painted wallpaper (often decorated with similar subjects of gardens or figures in landscapes).[35]

8 Jeanne-Etienne Liotard, John, Lord Mountstuart, later 4th Earl and 1st Marquess of Bute, 1763, pastel on vellum, 114.9 × 90.2 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000.58.

The introduction to the 1992 catalogue of the Ryser collection of reverse-painted glass, remarked upon the animated, mysterious appeal of images applied to the reverse side of plate glass, which become imbued with "life-giving reflections," especially when displayed within interiors lit by flickering candlelight.[36] Indeed, this "polite" reflectivity also enabled the beholder to glimpse themselves within a delicately rendered fantasy of the "exotic" East. Surrounded by courtly figures, flowering plants and eye-catching birds, the hybrid quality of reverse-painted mirrors blended two very different worlds into one. The implications of this experience, or possibility, on the British psyche at this transformative moment in its history is difficult to fathom. Nevertheless, as cities grew, generating new social networks and newly consolidated consumer markets, the polished surface came to embody the ideology of a society in a state of self-conscious coalescence. In addition, the polished, "glassy" surface, whether reflecting or transmitting light, both enabled and represented the polite values of the age. I suggest that considering Chinese reverse-painted glass within this context gives us a more complete understanding of its reception and appreciation in eighteenth-century Britain, and that fashionable representations of the refined and "exotic" East rendered on glass were imbued with further significance and prestige as signifiers of polite, or polished, taste.

1 This essay derives from a chapter first published in Maxwell 2020, in which I endeavor to rehabilitate plate glass in discussion of eighteenth-century material culture, often overlooked as purely functional and utilitarian, and present it as an expensive, modern, and culturally significant material.
2 Audric 2020, 29.
3 For discussion on the reception of reverse painted glass in China see, Gao 2020, <https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/art_sci_etds/2032/> (accessed 5 March 2021). As others demonstrate in this volume, reverse painted mirrors also became popular elsewhere in Asia.
4 Pritchard 1957, 130.
5 For a discussion of transparencies in the late eighteenth century, see Barnaby 2009.
6 Petzold 2000, 57, 59, n. 39. The works were renderings of Raphael's *Transfiguration* and Daniele da Volterra's *Descent from the Cross*. Neither is known to have survived.
7 *The World*, April 1791, cited in Cobb 2011.
8 The original adorned the ceiling of the Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi in Rome and was one of the most popular and extensively reproduced images associated with the Grand Tour. Guido Reni was one of the most popular Italian Old Masters among eighteenth-century collectors. Empress Catherine II of Russia purchased Reni's monumental *Fathers of the Church Disputing the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception* (1620–1642, 273.5 × 184 cm, Hermitage Museum, Russia) from Houghton Hall for an astronomical £3,500. Reitlinger 1964, vol.1, 8. Rydlová/Larson/Maxwell 2019.
9 National Art Library Press Cuttings (1686–1835), v. 3, 744; Petzold 2000, 58, n. 40.
10 Reitlinger 1964, vol. 1, 62.
11 Northcote 1815, 53.
12 For a survey of the genre, see Stanley 2006 and Clarke 1928.
13 Stalker/Parker 1688, 70–71.
14 Stalker/Parker 1688, 70.
15 Johnson 1768.
16 *An Essay on Polite Behaviour* (London, 1740) describes complaisance as "a gentle and easy Virtue, it makes us content with everyone; or if not, so artfully to conceal our resentments that none may perceive our ill humour or suffer by it" (p. 2). It continues, "Its principal Design is to conform to all sorts of Tempers" (p. 10).
17 Shaftesbury 1900 (reprint), 255.
18 Rochefoucauld 2015 (reprint), 30.
19 Burney 2001 (reprint), 28.
20 Ware 1756, 316.
21 Neve 1703, 149–151.
22 Crook/Port 1973, 90–91.
23 Hume 2014, 377.
24 Coutts 2017, 161–191.
25 Bamford 1983, 95.
26 Scott Thomson 1949, 71–72.
27 Rothstein 1987.
28 Based on the average price of sixty-four paintings sold at an auction of pictures by Thomas Worlidge (1700–1766) of Covent Garden, London, in 1754.
29 This figure is based on the nine plates of glass measuring 15.2 inches by 12.2 inches purchased at 10s. 10d. each (total £4 17s. 6d.) for fitting into windows at Woburn Abbey in 1790. Bedfordshire Archives, Russell Papers, R394.
30 In 1760, the 4th Duke of Bedford spent £167 10s. on "one large Plate," measuring 76 inches by 44 inches, and a further £15 15s. on insuring and transporting it to Woburn Abbey from London. Bill dated September 13, 1760, from Thomas Woodin and Paul Saunders. Woburn Abbey Archives, I.N. 2098.
31 Owsley/Rieder, 1974.
32 Owsley/Rieder 1974, 15.
33 Delany 1862 (reprint), 112.

34 Nevertheless, we must not underestimate the practical attributes of bright, unfading colors fixed behind a surface that was easy to clean.

35 De Bruijn 2017. De Bruijn cites the decoration of bedrooms at Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire, England, in which the twenty-seven sheets of "Indian Taffaty paper" wallpaper decorated with "Indian Birds and Flowers" used in one room cost £27 7s.

36 Eswarin 1992, 7.

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3

ILLUSIONISTIC PRACTICES AMONG *LES ARTS DU FEU* IN MID-EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CANTON

Kee Il Choi Jr.

Abstract

This essay links a 1770 export punch bowl renowned for its evocation of William Hogarth's *A Midnight Modern Conversation* and a reverse-mirror glass painting, the design of which is identical—but for the integration of mirrored passages—to the Cantonese reimagining of the English scene enameled on the ceramic's flipside. It then explores analogous illusionistic conceits employed in enameled copper plaques, notably cutouts that silhouette landscape paintings on paper inserted from behind. Such devices not only enhanced a picture's spatial complexity, but also the viewer's involvement in its narrative. This is exemplified by reverse-mirror paintings depicting the *meiren hua* genre exported to Europe by the early 1740s, when the Jesuit painter Jean-Denis Attiret first observed Cantonese glass artisans at work in the Qing palace workshops. His experience of making glass paintings may well have influenced his later approach to imperially commanded trompe l'œil wall decoration in 1759.

Keywords

Export porcelain, reverse-mirror glass painting, copper enamel, *meiren hua*, Jean-Denis Attiret, William Hogarth

Copper, porcelain, and glass—to paraphrase Lihong Liu—simultaneously represent both materials *and* mediums.[1] In the early modern period, the term *les arts du feu* came to signify a category of materials—clay, metal, and glass—that when subjected to intense heat were transformed into or used as artistic mediums—in this case enameled porcelain, enameled copper, and the related practice of reverse-mirror glass painting. In this article, I will propose how Cantonese artisans of the mid-eighteenth century overcame the inherent limitations of these materials and thereby inventively redefined the aesthetic range of the ensuing pictorial mediums. My point of departure is a punch bowl renowned as a masterwork of Chinese export porcelain for its brilliant evocation of William Hogarth's (1697–1764) *A Midnight Modern Conversation* (figs. 1a–b).[2] Here, I will analyze it as a site of Cantonese painting of exceptional quality—exemplary of *les arts du feu*—high-fired enamels applied to a vitreous ceramic. Its opposite face,

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1a–b *Punch Bowl,* 1770–1775, a) *A Midnight Modern Conversation*, b) *A Chinese Tavern Scene,* China, porcelain and enamels, 22.9 × 53.5 cm, Private Collection.

moreover, is decorated with an equally remarkable Chinese or "local" version of that European model which—for the first time—is presented here as the subject of a reverse-mirror glass painting in the Sze Yuan Tang 思源堂藏 collection (fig. 2).[3]

The incidence of both Hogarth's tavern and its Cantonese reimagining rendered on the same porcelain, together with the related reverse-mirror glass painting signals an exceptional survival, the close study of which invites a broader inquiry into illusionistic practices among diverse artisan studios in mid-eighteenth century Canton. Toward this end, I will examine in turn: Hogarth's 1733 print after his painting of 1732; how the decoration in the early 1770s of the Hogarth bowl encompassed both his print as well as the complementary, "local" response to that imported design; how the design of the reverse glass painting in the Tze Yuan Tang collection, though based on the same template, integrates mirrored passages that enhance the spatial complexity of its composition; how an allied group of enameled copper plaques achieves analogous illusionistic effects by employing similar, medium-specific pictorial devices; and finally, how the experience of actually making reverse-mirror glass paintings in the early

2 *A Chinese Tavern Scene,* 1770–1775, Canton, China, reverse-mirror glass painting, 43.2 × 69.5 cm, Sze Yuan Tang Collection.

1740s, may well have influenced the French Jesuit painter Jean-Denis Attiret's (Wang Zhicheng 王致诚, 1702–1768) later approach to trompe l'œil wall painting as tantalizingly exemplified by his sketches depicting *meiren* 美人 ("a beauty") commissioned by the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1735–1796) in 1759.

Hogarth in Canton: Copied and Reimagined on Porcelain and Glass

William Hogarth's original oil painting of 1732 shows the interior of a coffee house where conviviality abetted by excessive quantities of alcohol frequently resulted in intemperate behavior, especially among the elites whom he so effectively lampooned by means of such popular satirical prints (fig. 3).[4] His engraving of 1733 condenses the visual cacophony of the scene, pulling it from the murky depth of the painting, situating it instead in the shallow foreground, thus making the print especially well-suited for reproduction on ceramics not only in China but also in Europe.[5] Echoing John Ruskin's (1819–1900) observation "For the general grace of its outline a dome is merely to be considered as a cup turned upside down,"[6] like his counterpart at Delft, the painter in Canton elected to splay the decoration on the bowl in two panels, carpeting its curved girth from the foot to the rim—indeed, as if it's inverted shape was tantamount to a dome, thus addressing similar challenges in achieving an illusionistic *quadratura* painting (figs. 1a–b). In figure 1a, for example, the illusion of the Hogarth's scene is achieved as much by color and the framing of the three wood panels in the rear as by any discernible per-

3 William Hogarth, *A Midnight Modern Conversation*, 1732, etching and engraving, 34.6 × 47.3 (plate) cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 91.1.77.

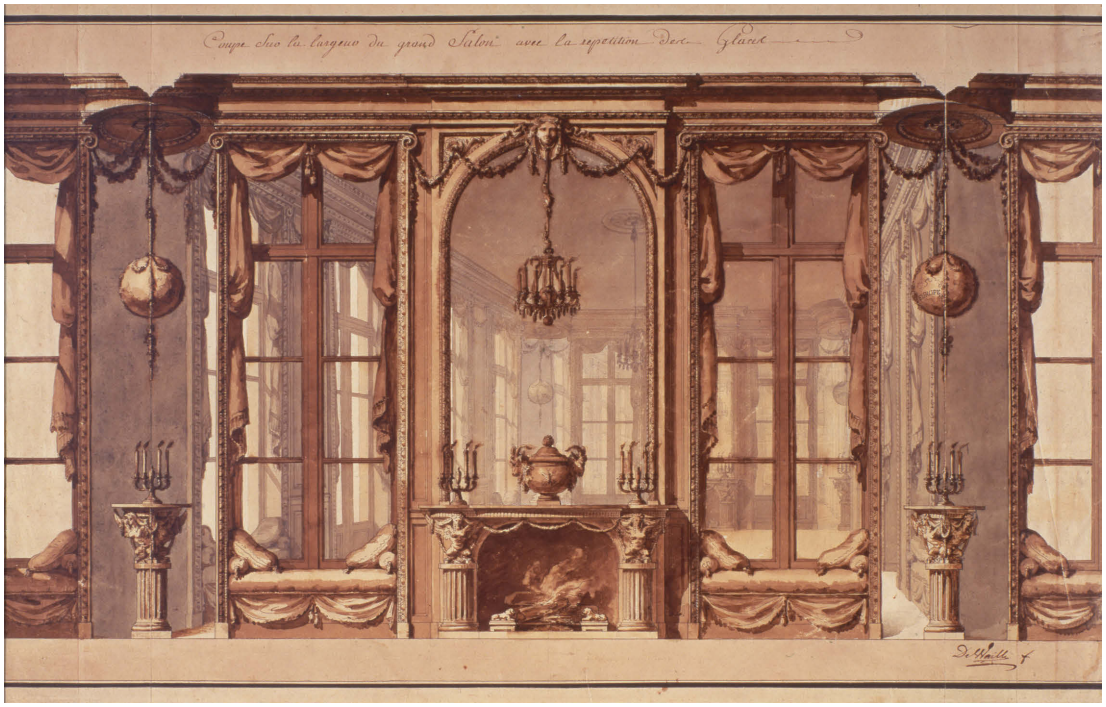
spectival plan. In the engraving, a cloth masks the structure of the underlying table making it easier for the Cantonese painter to render its scene on the bowl's curved surface. Whereas figure 1b reveals a more sophisticated grasp of fixed-point perspective than might have been gleaned from Hogarth's print alone. Here, orthogonal edges of the table guide the viewer to the focal point fixed behind the central seated figure. A small boy enters from an acutely abbreviated, ancillary space to the left, one separated from the central area by a diagonally situated wooden threshold, beyond which we see the mere trace of a garden. And though derived from the same template, the design of figure 2 is even more complex because mirrored passages are deployed to signal the ancillary spaces otherwise barely suggested in enameled porcelain. While a crowded table remains the scene's narrative center, a capacious terrace expands the overall composition considerably to the left. What had been a furnished space to the rear right of the bowl has all but disappeared. Instead, mirrored passages now silhouette or define these ancillary spaces.

The complementary pairing or "twinning" of subjects on the same object originally born of influential models like Hogarth's print would appear to have been a recurrent strategy in the marketing of export ceramics at this time, especially punch bowls

which offered interiors and exteriors as pictorial supports.[7] In 1889, the Kode Art Museums, Bergen, Norway, acquired another bowl identically decorated with Hogarth's print.[8] But its flipside was enameled with a portrait of the Danish East Indiaman *Mars*, the ciphers of its merchant owner and his wife who were married in 1767, and with an inscription in Danish exhorting the user of the bowl to temperate behavior. So configured, such porcelains satisfied equivalent foreign and domestic demand for the exotic, especially as in the case of figures 1a–b, where the "twin" was not identical but "fraternal." But not all graphic sources invited a moral or political response. For example, the interior of a punch bowl formerly in the Alvaro Conde collection is decorated with a scene of fox hunting based upon a series of popular engravings made after paintings by James Seymour (1702–1752).[9] A programmatic, local reimagining of this manifestly English subject is splayed across its exterior girth in two panels. A twinned program of musicians in concert is featured in four panels spread across the exterior of a punch bowl in New York.[10] The two larger panels are based upon a 1777 satirical print depicting a chamber music concert held at the University of Cambridge in 1767.[11] The English musicians are arrayed rather rigidly in a frieze comprised of interlocking figures in profile. Painted in two smaller, alternating panels, the local version of the concert displays a similarly configured but patently more relaxed group of Chinese musicians.[12] James Watt observed that the most efficacious examples of "Occidentalism" in Chinese art often resulted when the European subject made few or no cultural demands on the Chinese artist interpreting it.[13] Hunters, musicians, or indeed tavern goers were familiar subjects that presented few, if any cultural challenges—hence leaving the artist free to adapt the model at hand according to the limitations of the medium in which he was working.

La répétition des glaces

Any appraisal of the aesthetics of a reverse glass painting, especially one rendered on a mirror, is hampered by the fact that in order to discern its overall design rationally, the pictures—such as figures 2, 8, and 10—are typically photographed in a light-diffusing tent, which makes the mirrored passages appear leaden and static. In addition, the sheet glass employed featured highly polished, reflective surfaces, which imposed other challenging limitations upon the painter. For one thing, oils or colors reinforced with gum were painstakingly applied to the reverse not only to protect the fugitive paint layer, but also to situate the intended illusion in the liminal space perceived just beneath the sheet's translucent surface. As a contemporary French account affirmed, "the painting lies between the glass and its color, the one bound to the other in a manner that seems incomprehensible to anyone not skilled in these sorts of arts."[14] Indeed, akin to the European practice of applying varnish to the surface of an oil painting, the sheet's reflective quality had the effect of moderating the colors across the breadth of a composition.[15] Only when glass paintings are seen in ambient light does the viewer become fully immersed in the illusion of space



4 Charles de Wailly, *Design for a Grand Salon Lined with Mirrors*, 1770s, brown-and-black ink, wash, and graphite on paper (three pieces joined; reinforced on verso), 13.2 × 18.5 cm, Inscriptions: at top: *Coupe sur la largeur du grand Salon avec la repetition des Glaces*; bottom right: *De Wailly f.*, Waddesdon (National Trust).

or the narrative unfolding therein; his and other reflections shift constantly depending on the angle at which the picture is viewed. An analogy is found in an elevation for a mirror-lined room brilliantly rendered by the French architect Charles de Wailly (1730–1798)—a graphic manifestation of the "glass consciousness" which Lihong Liu has shown also permeated the visual culture of the Qing 請 court at this time (fig. 4).[16] In this drawing made for the benefit of a client who could readily imagine himself within the space it proposed, De Wailly conveyed the myriad perspectives of its decorative scheme through what he partially inscribed at the top as *la répétition des glaces* ("an infinity of mirrors").

Designs and Devices in Enameled Copper

More or less contemporary with the Hogarth bowls and the Tze Yuan Tang painting, another Cantonese artisan applied the same template to the design of a richly appointed interior inhabited by a mandarin (fig. 5). But instead of enameled porcelain or painted glass, he worked in enameled copper—another of *les arts du feu*—and likewise deployed medium-specific spatial devices. Figure 5 is one of sixteen, stylistically and dimensionally similar, enameled copper plaques, all framed in the European manner with gilt black lacquer sections equipped with brass, cloud-scroll hangers.[17] Eight of

5 *Plaque*, 1770–1775, Canton, China, painted enamel on copper, in the background, oil on paper, 37 × 48.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, AK-NM-6620-A.

them (Rijksmuseum) were purchased in Canton in the 1770s, for Jean Theodore Royer (1737–1807). Of the other recorded examples, four are in the Speelman Collection; the others were last exhibited in 1964.[18] Royer simultaneously acquired ten enameled porcelain plaques (Rijksmuseum) of similar graphic quality and encased in European-style, gilt, neo-classical frames, the subjects of which were derived from both European prints and traditional narratives such as *Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji* 西厢记).[19]

Even though the plaques depict vibrantly colored domestic settings inhabited by men, women, and children dressed in both Han 汉and Manchu 满族 attire, they are not technically "conversation" pieces because the figures do not credibly interact with each other or their urbane settings. Rather, they resemble stage sets, which, as Jan van Campen has observed, present "not so much their content as a demonstration of a command of the European method of suggesting space."[20] Indeed, the enameled copper plaques feature fixed-point perspective, cast shadows, shading, partially drawn curtain frames, and details in repoussé. In addition to the application of the same perspectival architecture employed in figure 2, figure 5 has been transformed by the cutting of its copper support in order to create the outline of a landscape or sky, the details of which were painted in oils on a sheet of paper that was then inserted from behind. Like the mirrored passages in the glass painting, the cutouts extend the

6 *Plaque*, 1770–1775, Canton, China, painted enamel on copper, in the background oil on paper, 40×51 cm, A & J Speelman.

pictorial range of the composition—literally beyond the picture plane—and thereby increase the viewer's engagement with the space that the plaque presents. Figure 6 further teases the viewer's perception of pictorial truth by utilizing not only a cutout silhouette of a distant landscape, but also a fictive mirror that is simultaneously cut out of and enameled upon the copper support, a sheet of metal inserted from behind to simulate a mirror glass. Employing the technique of *mise en abîme*, like a distant echo of the *Arnolfini Wedding* by Jan van Eyck (ca. 1390–1441), it not only plays with the viewer's perception of the wall, but also mimics the material and design of the very gilt-lacquer frame—replete with mitered corners and a cloud-scroll brass hanger—that surrounds the enameled plaque.

Meiren Hua on Paper and Glass in Canton

In addition to the pervasive European print, indigenous models were equally influential upon painting in Canton, be they local in origin or derived from other practices in China, especially from the Qing court and professional workshops around Peking (Beijing). An example that attests to the fluid dissemination of vocabularies across artistic centers is that of the *meiren hua* 美人画 or vernacular paintings of beautiful women,

which Yeewan Koon has rightly linked to certain leaves from a composite album of Cantonese watercolors purchased at auction in London in 1747 by Philip Yorke, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke (1720–1790; fig. 7).[21] She asserts that within this album "we see the development of a cultural space that generated certain types of [highly sophisticated] knowledge about China," hence her promotion of an art history predicated upon a "Chinese Canton"—an inviolate cultural space separate and distinct from what she also sternly characterizes as the "patterning" of so much export painting. Although the late James Cahill first studied the genre in the domestic context, if nothing else, Thierry Audric has furnished ample evidence that the *meiren hua* theme had also penetrated the export market for reverse-mirror glass paintings by the middle of the eighteenth century.[22] In 1745, Alexandre d'Orléans, Marquis de Rothelin (1688–1764), is said to have received the gift of a "mirror painting from China, where one sees a Chinese lady at her dressing table."[23]

The previously unknown correlation of figures 7 and 8 would indeed seem to undermine any assertion stipulating a lack of cultural equivalency between an export demand for imagery of this type and such local vocabularies or painting traditions which Cantonese painters clearly adapted in their zeal to serve both foreign and domestic markets.[24] Largely stripped of a linear spatial artifice as well as the genre's attendant prettiness, figure 8 is arguably a more efficacious statement of the *meiren hua* tradition than figure 7, a comparatively less disciplined, cluttered composition. The mirror not only enhances the beauty's solitude, but also draws the viewer into her liminal space. And her gaze, more plausibly focused upon a pair of frolicking dogs, further heightens the intended eroticism.

***Meiren Hua*, Reverse-mirror Glass Painting and Jean-Denis Attiret**

The tradition of the *meiren hua* and the practice of reverse-mirror glass painting had already coalesced within the creative ferment around Peking when the French Jesuit painter Jean-Denis Attiret first arrived at the Qing court in 1739.[25] Soon thereafter, and together with his mentor the Italian Jesuit painter Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining 郎世寧, 1688–1766), Attiret was imperially commanded to master what fellow French Jesuit Pierre-Martial Cibot (Han Guoying 韩国英, 1727–1780) would later call "the art of painting on mirrors."[26] Just as Castiglione had early in his career at the Qing court been seconded to an enamel workshop perhaps because it was thought that he possessed some specialized skill in that medium, Attiret too was assigned to adopt another highly specialized, equally unfamiliar European art form. Fortuitously, Cantonese glass painters were then employed in a special capacity within the palace workshops where, as Father Cibot would relate, Attiret and Castiglione, clearly apprehensive about the undertaking before them, "wanted to observe the Chinese painters at work, before venturing into this new kind of painting."[27]

In a letter dated November 4, 1741, addressed to his patron Claude Joseph Froissard, Marquis de Broissia (1657–1750), Attiret detailed the practice of making reverse-mirror

7 Artist in China, "Wife of an Official," from *Album of Costumes of China*, 1740, opaque watercolor on paper, 39.9 × 30.3 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, AE85315.7.

glass paintings.[28] While the Qianlong emperor was clearly captivated by the medium, it seems that he had so tasked the Jesuits partly to utilize some highly prized, imported French mirrors, the tin-mercury amalgam of which had been damaged in transit from Europe. Attiret not only confirmed that he had been painting on glass for over a year, but also that some of the mirrors upon which he had been working "have suffered in transport, and lost their silvering in a few places."[29] By learning to paint on mirrors as opposed to translucent sheets of glass, he had come to understand that the practice involved not only working "backward," but also the painstaking integration of mirrored passages within a given composition as well as the calculation of their concomitant effects. He first made a preparatory drawing in pencil and color which, when applied to the reverse of a mirror glass, transferred the outlines of the design, within which by inference the excess tin-mercury amalgam was subsequently scraped away leaving voids to be in-painted. Cibot would later corroborate this fundamental stage of the practice.[30] Attiret concluded enthusiastically, "This type of painting is all the more beautiful because, when seen from a short distance, it seems as if the figures, animals, landscape or any other design is not painted on the mirror, but reflected: one's face can be seen in the gaps left by the painting, which makes for very attractive variety."[31] Even though his letter documents the extent to which mastering the Cantonese prac-

8 *Beauty on Her Veranda*, 1750–1760, Canton, China, reverse-mirror glass painting, 66 × 50 cm, Private Collection.

tice of reverse-mirror glass painting had left Attiret with an appreciation of the medium's exceptional aesthetic qualities, sadly no pictures by him have been identified. In addition, his two drawings depicting *meiren* are the sole evidence of wall-mounted paintings commissioned by the Qianlong emperor in 1759 for the no longer extant Clear View Pavilion (*Chengguan'ge* 澄观阁) in the *Yuanming yuan* 圆明园.[32] But as variants of the popular *meiren hua* tradition, figure 9 and its pendant *Beauty Seated at Her Dressing Table* prompt one to examine whether the trompe l'œil designs they propose owe as much to his making reverse-mirror glass paintings as to his familiarity with iconic examples of the genre which, as Kristina Kleutghen has argued, the Yongzheng 雍正皇帝 emperor's (r. 1722–1735) *Beauty at Her Threshold*—one from the series known as *Twelve Beauties at Leisure*—is an apposite cognate especially for its life-size scale.[33]

Neither a rough sketch (*première pensée du projet*), nor a highly finished drawing, figure 9 offers a precise diagram of the motif from which Attiret most certainly would have worked up a cartoon in order to transfer its outlines to a length of silk in a scale commensurate with that of other, referent, life-size screen paintings or hanging scrolls such as the aforementioned *Beauty at Her Threshold*. But otherwise divested of what Cahill characterized as the tradition's "detailed opulence," it offers instead an austere

9 Jean-Denis Attiret, *Sketch for Scenic Illusion Intended for the Clear View Pavilion*, 1759, black chalk on paper, 19.7 × 9.9 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cote Cliché NB-C-240547, Manuscrits occidentaux, NAF 5371 fol. 56r.

distillation of the *meiren hua* vocabulary—as Kleutghen enumerated "doorway, curtain, woman, stools."[34] Similarly, a reverse-mirror glass painting of the same subject is also stripped of all but the most basic elements of the formula—veranda, curtain, and woman (fig. 10).[35] Thus, one can readily imagine Attiret's diminutive outline drawing serving equally as a mediating vehicle for a reverse-mirror glass painting as for scaled-up wall decoration.

By comparing figures 9 and 10 directly, we highlight their interdependence, not only in terms of a shared iconography, but also a common approach to illusionistic painting. Both employ the same economical syntax to express the essence of the *meiren hua* theme. Kleutghen has astutely observed how in figure 9 the lower contour of the curtain elides with beauty's robe, "tempting the viewer to correlate the lifted curtain with a lifted skirt."[36] By holding it back, she not only exposes her demurely inviting face but also, as a further enticement, proffers a fulsome, open sleeve dangling from her concealed left arm—a recurrent feature of the genre that has been likened to the vulva.[37] In Attiret's drawing, the dramatically foreshortened sleeve clearly locates the beauty's genitals set atop the axis of her slightly parted robe.

As a finished work, figure 10 helps us to imagine how the coordination of curtain and costume so carefully mapped in Attiret's drawing must have been conveyed to a finished, wall-mounted painting. Not only are the two actually joined—thereby ensuring

10 *Beauty on Her Veranda*, 1750–1760. Canton, China, reverse-mirror glass painting, 23.5 × 17.5 cm, Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, BS 2481.

that the parting curtain will reveal beauty in her natural state – they are further amalgamated by means of subtle differences in the colors of the textiles, as well as the positive/negative play of embroidered, floral roundels. Figure 8—a comparable variant of the same theme—also telegraphs erotic tension coursing between costume and curtain, again by means of a common blue color and, to a lesser degree, embroidered patterns. As the curtain is now fully drawn, the viewer encounters beauty discretely contemplating the denouement of her lonely narrative. Its white lining reverberates with a trace of a white undergarment, a connection portending her ultimate disrobing. The evocative correlation of the *meiren* to her material surroundings by means of color and pattern is, as Kleutghen has also affirmed, a signature stylistic feature of this tradition in both scroll and screen formats.[38] But because the compositions of figures 8 and 10 are so conspicuously simplified and separated from most of the concomitant markers of her material equivalence to other luxurious things, the *meiren's* solitude is dramatically heightened by means of the mirrored ground, the reflections of which entice the viewer to become fully immersed in her restricted domain. Similarly, because Attiret's drawings propose spaces that are equally redolent of the same stripped-down approach to the theme, one can only imagine what color he would originally have selected for the minimal background in each. At the very least, like a mirror, it would have served to dematerialize the opaque silk support

upon which the motif was transferred in order somehow to bolster the illusion of the *meiren's* presence.

Conclusion

By examining the Hogarth bowl together with the allied reverse-mirror glass painting and enameled plaque, this paper has contributed modestly to an emerging history of the art of Canton—one founded not on a tenuous tissue of theories, but efficaciously rooted in objects. I have endeavored to demonstrate how local artisans transformed the materials of clay, metal, and glass into *les arts du feu* of enameled porcelain, copper enamel, and painted glass. Through repeated engagement over time with imported designs such as Hogarth's print, they absorbed these models and, by inventing pictorial conceits such as mirrored passages and cutout silhouettes, expanded the idea of what a Chinese painting could do. Such devices were intended not only to enhance the scale of a picture, but also to involve the viewer emotionally with its contents. In this sense, irrespective of the plausible idea that actually making glass pictures influenced his later approach to illusionistic rendering, figure 10 helps us to visualize how Attiret's diagrammatic design might have looked when scaled up, painted on silk, and then affixed to the wall of Clear View Pavilion. Both works succeed because they induce the viewer to join the *meiren* in her restricted space—an illusion distinctively achieved in the glass painting by what Charles de Wailly would have recognized as "[une] répétition des glaces."

1 Liu 2016, 18.
2 Howard 1997, 119, no. 146; Kaelin 1998, 77–79, no. 55; and Christie's 2004, lot 43.
3 Bearnes Hampton & Littlewood 2016, lot 725; Min Chiu Society 2020, 352–353.
4 Einberg 2016, 96–97, no. 57 for Hogarth's 1732 oil painting; and Paulson 1970, no. 128, iii/iii, for his 1733 engraving.
5 Tharp 1997, 47–55, fig. 40.
6 Ruskin 1906, vol. 23, 216.
7 Sargent 2014, 274–275, no. 112.
8 Huitfeldt 1993, 42–43 (exterior with inscription), and 70–74 (ship portrait).
9 Christie's 2019, lot 48.
10 Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. no. 51.86.413). Phillips 1956, 138, fig. 45 (engraving), pl. 56 (bowl).
11 British Museum (inv. no. 1852, 1211.135). Engraved by Sir Abraham Hume (1749–1838) after a drawing attributed to Thomas Orde-Powlett (1746–1807).
12 Hervouët 1986, 190, fig. 8.19 a & b (Chinese musicians).
13 Watt 1996, 513–515; Kleutghen 2014.
14 Savary des Brûlons 1770, 175: "Mais la peinture se trouve entre la glace & son teint, tenant également à l'une & l'autre d'une manière qui paroit incompréhensible à ceux qui ne se sont jamais exercés dans ces sortes d'arts."
15 Schweizerisches Forschungszentrum zur Glasmalerei Romont 2000, 15–16.
16 Laing 2006, 211–212, no. 154; Liu 2016, 30–34; and Maxwell 2020, 46–47, fig. 35, apropos "glass consciousness" in a 1775 design by Robert Adam (1728–1792) for a glass-paneled drawing room.
17 Van Campen 2002; and Van Campen 2004 b.

18 Christie's 1976, lot 212; A & J Speelman 2002, 74–76, no. 34; Sotheby's 2018, lot 3460; and Oriental Ceramic Society 1963–1964, 72, no. 353, pl. 111.
19 Van Campen 2004 a, for Royer's enameled porcelain plaques; and Grasskamp 2015, 374–383.
20 Van Campen 2004 b, 72.
21 Koon 2019, 82–84, fig. 5.5.
22 Cahill 2010, 149–197; Cahill et al. 2013, 9–21; Audric 2020, 52–70, 73, and 182–195, cat. nos. 109 to 213.
23 Savary des Brûlons 1770, 175: "d'un mirroir de chine, où l'on voyoit une Chinoise à sa toilette."
24 Sotheby's 2007, lot 23; and Audric 2020, 192–193, no. 195.
25 Fris-Larrouy 2017, 93–101.
26 Cibot 1786, 363: "De l'art de peindre [sic] sur les glaces."
27 Curtis 2009, 50–52; and Cibot 1786, 364: "ils voulurent voir opérer les Peintres chinois, avant de se risquer dans ce nouveau genre de peinture."
28 Fris-Larrouy 2017, 15, n. 9; Attiret 1741 (text); and Audric 2020, 26–27 (translation).
29 Attiret 1741, 4: "Quelques-unes de ces glaces ont, dans le transport, souffert, perdu l'étain dans quelque endroit."
30 Cibot 1786, 365.
31 Attiret 1741, 4: "Cette espèce de peinture est d'autant plus belle que, vue d'un peu loin, on croit que les figures, les animaux, les paysages ou tout autre dessin n'est pas peint sur la glace mais réfléchi, on se voit au travers des intervalles que laisse la peinture, ce qui fait une variété très jolie."
32 Cahill 2010, 51–53; and Kleutghen 2015, 263–265, fig. 6.18 a & b for both of Attiret's preparatory drawings for the 1759 imperial commission.
33 Kleutghen 2015, 245–247, fig. 611, *Beauty at Her Threshold*; and Hung 1996, 116–117, figs. 85 to 96, for the entire screen of *Twelve Beauties* (ca. 1709 and 1723, Palace Museum, Beijing).
34 Cahill 2010, 157; and Kleutghen 2015, 264.
35 Wirgin 1998, 296, no. 305.
36 Kleutghen 2015, 264.
37 Cahill 2010, 53; Cahill et al. 2013, 110–111, no 25; and Kleutghen 2015, 250–251, fig. 6.14.
38 Kleutghen 2015, 245–247.

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4

LIGHT, REFLECTION, AND REVERSE GLASS PAINTING AT THE NGUYỄN COURT

William H. Ma

Abstract

Though artistic examples are not difficult to find in Southeast Asia today, studies on reverse glass painting in this region are rare, and this lacuna is particularly glaring in Vietnam. Historically, one of the most important patrons of the medium was the Nguyễn imperial family in the nineteenth century, and examples can still be found at major imperial structures in Huế. They were an integral part of the rich and vibrant Sino-Vietnamese style of court art. This paper will give an overview of reverse glass paintings in Nguyễn Vietnam, with a particular emphasis on the content and materiality of reverse glass painting within its original light environment. By presenting reverse glass paintings as surfaces to be looked at and for reflection, both literally and metaphorically, the paper argues for a novel and holistic approach for the contextualization of reverse glass paintings.

Keywords

Reverse glass painting, Nguyễn, Vietnam, light

"A reverse painting on glass is completely different" than paintings done in other media, as the Vitromusée Romont informs its visitors in a small catalog of the collection, not least because of the unique experience of seeing the painting:

> It is the glass support that is first seen by the viewer – and often he sees the reflections from this hard, yet fragile, material rather than the image. In order to perceive the picture, he must patiently direct his gaze through the glass to the painted back surface. The paint layer appears as smooth as the glass itself, the thickness of the modelling barely visible; the colours are sharp and brilliant, protected as they have been by the glass from dirt and the ravages of time.[1] (fig. 1)

This paper centers around an exposition of this particular viewing experience in the context of reverse glass paintings in the interior of the imperial structures of the Nguyễn dynasty (1802–1945) in Vietnam.[2] I argue that the material characteristics of reverse glass painting were directly connected to their appeal to the Nguyễn rulers' and court aesthetics, in particular the medium's simultaneous quality of serving as a

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1 The author at the *Reflets de Chine* exhibition at the Vitromusée Romont in February 2020.

viewing surface and a reflective surface. The materiality of the paintings was supported and supplemented by their pictorial content, which was specific to the Nguyễn court agendas as revealed by their original display environment within the formal interiors of various imperial structures like the now-destroyed Hall of Diligent Governance (Điện Cân Chánh).

Today, several dozen surviving reverse glass paintings are on display at imperial sites around the Nguyễn capital of Huế: the Huế Royal Antiquities Museum, the Palace of Extending Life (Cung Diên Thọ); and the Royal Library (Thái Bình Lâu); the Hall (and later Temple) of Harmony and Modesty (Điện Hòa Khiêm) at the Mausoleum of Emperor Tự Đức; the Điện Bieu Duc at the tomb of Emperor Thiệu Trị; Điện Sùng Ân at the tomb of Emperor Minh Mạng; and Điện Ngưng Hy at the tomb of Emperor Đồng Khánh; nearly all the sites are frequently visited by tourists.[3] A number of reverse glass paintings are in institutional storage in Vietnam, and new paintings occasionally appear on the international art market.[4]

The majority of the paintings still in existence included poems by the Emperor Thiệu Trị (r. 1841–1847), which provided a date of either 1844 or 1845. Though the dates corresponded to the poems, they can be used as approximate dates for the paintings as well. Nearly all who have written on these paintings mentioned that they were com-

2 One of the *Twenty Views of the Divine Capital* reverse glass paintings with poem by Emperor Thiệu Trị, Hue Antiquities Museum Collection.

missioned by Thiệu Trị and made in Guangzhou, China, a site that supplied many reverse glass paintings to Southeast Asia during the nineteenth century.[5] Given the number of blue-and-white porcelains designed by Vietnamese artists and made in China that are found throughout the Forbidden City and in the homes of the Nguyễn elites, this would not have been unusual.[6] Yet, given the lack of supporting archival evidence, stylistic comparison, and technical analysis have raised some serious questions about whether all or only a few of these paintings were created in Guangzhou.[7] Whether or not they were made in China or Vietnam, they should ultimately be seen as culturally and functionally Chinese. Like the preceding Lê dynasty (1428–1788), the Nguyễn court actively emulated the Ming and the Qing court in various ways. While it is important to situate the dynasty on their own terms, the impact of Confucian-based ideologies as originating from their neighbor to the north was essential to the legitimization of their rule.[8]

Reverse Painting in the Context of the Nguyễn Court

Generally speaking, three main subjects are found in the imperial paintings: programmatic set of scenes corresponding to poetic views of imperial landscapes such as the

3 Some of the reverse glass paintings at the Palace of Extending Life (Cung Diên Thọ), The Forbidden City, Huế, Vietnam.

Twenty Views of the Divine Capital (fig. 2), illustrations of other imperial poems, and didactic illustrations of moral lessons drawn from history. These themes were identified through the titles and poems attached or directly written underneath the glass panes, nearly all composed by Emperor Thiệu Trị. These subjects further separate these paintings from their supposed origin, since Cantonese export painters excelled in the depiction of beautiful women—as exotic Europeans or as domestic types conforming to the genre of beauty paintings.[9]

Today, these reverse glass paintings are hung in the same way as they were in the nineteenth century, just below the joint where the pillars meet the cross beams (fig. 3). It is the natural terminus for the viewer's eyes as they travel upward following the trajectory of the ascending dragons in gold against the gilded clouds and red lacquered pillars. Positioned downward at an angle, they mimic the position of the horizontal boards (*hoàng phi*), upon which the name of the building was written in the hand of a Nguyễn emperor. Both paintings and horizonal boards preserve and replicate the index of the emperor's physical presence through his calligraphy. As evidence of the imperial predecessor's cultivated mind and moral rectitude, these traces were constant commemorations intended for the living.

Formal imperial spaces and surfaces provided textual and visual opportunity for constant reminders of the ruler's moral responsibility for Heaven, his country, and his people. Corresponding imperial projects were clear about the ultimate objectives.

4 One of the reverse glass paintings illustrating one of the narratives from the *Emperor's Mirror, An Illustrated Discussion,* ca. 1840s, Hue Antiquities Museum Collection.

Responding to a report on the progress of the official history compilation in 1847, Emperor Thiệu Trị commented on the role of history:

> [I] believe that history [should] record clearly the experiences of the [past] generations in order to act as example for future generations. This is a matter of great importance. Our government bears the mandate that Heaven has given. . . . we continue on this great estate [and] we follow its main precepts, so that feeling of continuity reach [back] by imitating the deeds [of previous generations].[10]

In other words, the historical past legitimized the reign of the Nguyễn dynasty. As historian Nola Cooke has pointed out, though this version of the past was based on canonical Chinese history, it was modified by inserting the Nguyễn clan's own pre-dynastic history and native Vietnamese cosmological understandings.[11] Additionally, Thiệu Trị wrote his own commentaries on the *Emperor's Mirror, An Illustrated Discussion* (帝鑑圖説), an illustrated collection of exemplary behavior of historical and mythological rulers in China. Compiled for and presented to the newly enthroned Ming Emperor Wanli in 1573, it was hoped that the young child would reflect upon these narratives in text and in image and, like a mirror, model his behavior after them.[12] Woodblock prints based on the Ming edition were published by Thiệu Trị along with the commentaries, who also turned some of the illustrations into reverse glass paintings (fig. 4). It should be noted that like in case of Thiệu Trị's *Twenty Views of the Divine Capital*, which was also published as woodblock prints and painted on reverse glass,

5 Inside the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Điện Thái Hòa), The Forbidden City, Huế, Vietnam.

there was a significant pictorial gap between the prints and the paintings, suggesting that the process of translating across media was done indirectly.

In addition to the theme of reflection, the theme of light was another constant on imperial surfaces at the Nguyễn court. The heart of the imperial city was the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Điện Thái Hòa), where major official ceremonies took place. Other than the canopied throne, the most striking aspect of the relatively sparse interior was the nearly 300 poems and couplets on the upper registers of the walls (fig. 5).[13] Gilded against a red lacquered background, the calligraphic texts were another reminder of the emperor's many sacred duties. Yet the overwhelmingly golden aesthetic was not only limited to the decorative program, it was also a common refrain found in many of the poems. For example, many poems make explicit reference to sunlight, specifically sun rays and the light of the morning sun.[14] "Light" (光) was used as a noun or as a verb, the latter as a metaphor for bringing enlightenment to everything under Heaven (天下), or to a number of lofty and abstract concepts such as history (千古), Heavenly virtue (天德), people who wore "southern clothes" (南服; i.e., Vietnamese-style), and the efforts of imperial predecessors (前業).[15] Similarly, in the poems where the verb "to illuminate" or "to reflect" (照) appears, the sense of an omnipresent illumination reaching to the extremes or to dark places is evident.[16] Literally or metaphorically, the content of these glimmering textual surfaces lit and enlightened the internal spaces of the hall and its living occupants.

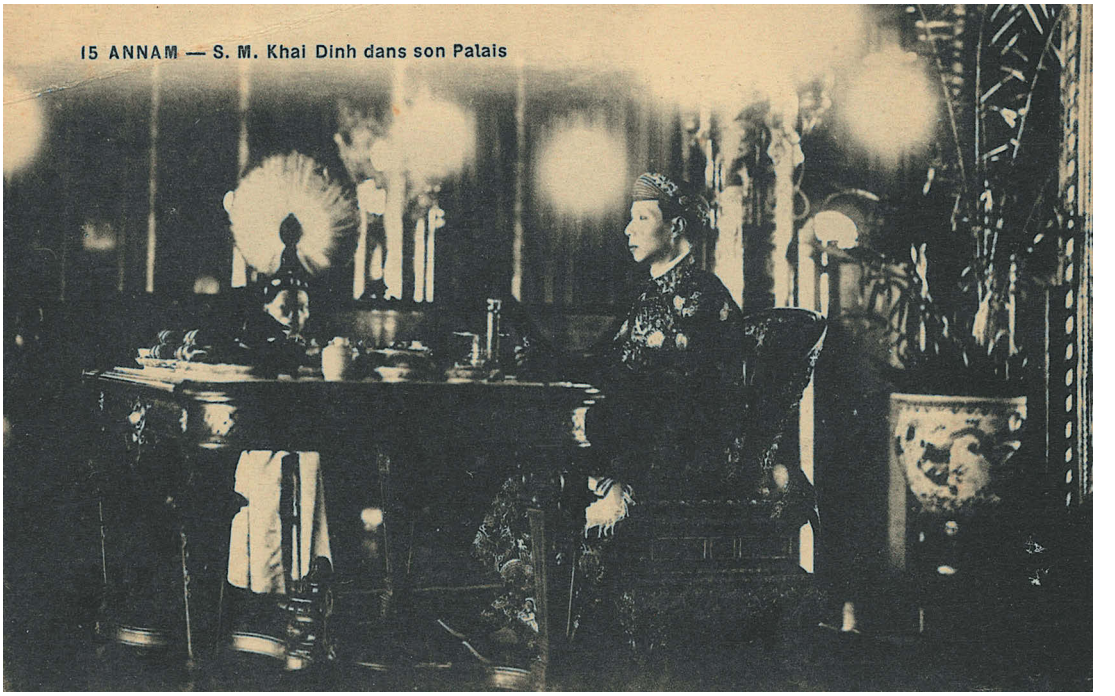
Seen in these contexts, reverse glass paintings functioned in ways analogous or parallel to other interior decorations in the formal spaces at the Nguyễn imperial palace. Through the calligraphic notes and the poems, they were a repository of the former emperor's sacred presence and wisdom. As an exotic luxury product from China, they reaffirmed the imperial self and the relationship with the powerful neighbor to the north. As pictorial surfaces to be looked at, they presented past moral lessons to the living emperor to ruminate upon and to reflect like a mirror. As a reflective surface, the reverse glass paintings function as a mirror that amplified and multiplied the light and golden hue inside the hall, spectacularly captured in early-twentieth century photographs of the Hall of Diligent Governance (Điện Cần Chánh).

In the Hall of Diligent Governance

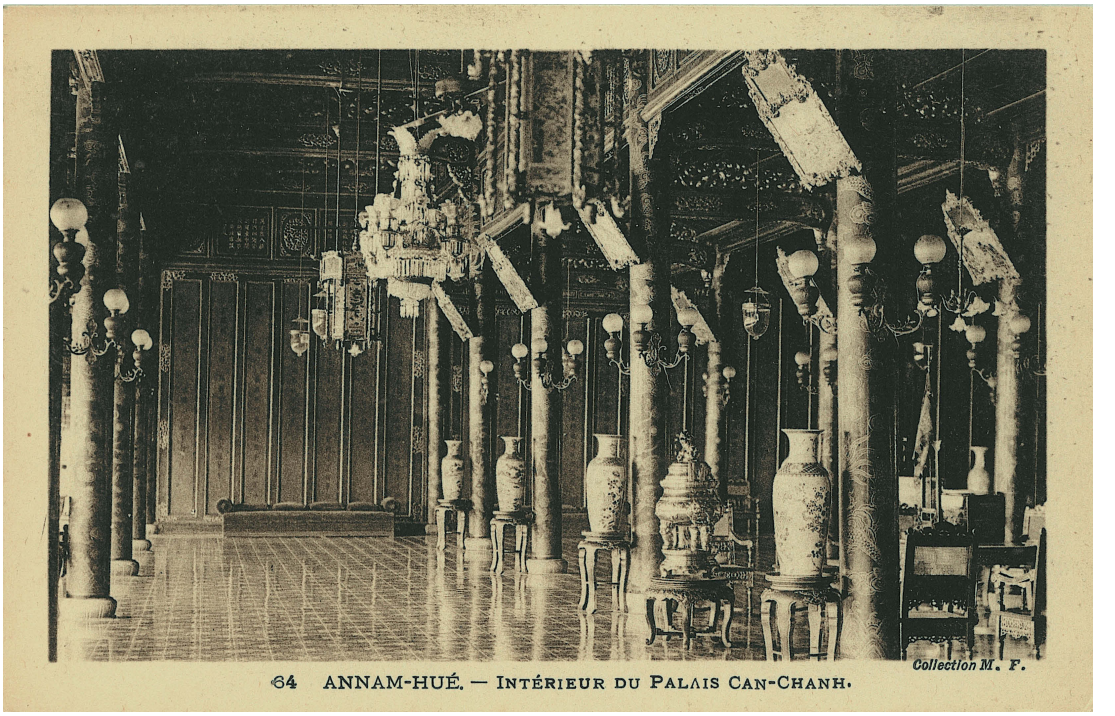
Referred to as the "most beautiful [room] in the palace" by the French colonial civil administrator Robert de la Susse, the Hall of Diligent Governance was destroyed along with several imperial buildings in the Forbidden City during the conflict between the Vietminh and the French colonial government in 1947.[17] Located along the central axis, the hall was situated directly behind the largest structure and the ritual center of the imperial city, the Hall of Supreme Harmony. Both halls were conceived as a unit and were part of the original plans as envisioned by Emperor Gia Long in 1804.[18] The Hall of Diligent Governance was a place for ritual preparation, reception of foreign dignitaries, and the "daily workplace and office … of the emperor."[19] By 1913, when De la Susse wrote about the palace, this section of the Forbidden City was opened for public visits, and some of the imperial buildings had already been converted into exhibition spaces.[20] By 1937, the Hall of Diligent Governance was included in a list of places to visit in Huế in the *Guide Tourisque Général de l'Indochine*.[21]

In addition to the eyewitness accounts, photographs and postcards serve as the most direct record for the appearance of the interior of the Hall of Diligent Governance and provide the most accurate view to the original display of the reverse glass paintings. Mostly from the 1920s to 1940s, these photographs were taken by foreign visitors in a semi-public space that had been radically transformed by the Francophilic Emperor Khải Định (r. 1916–1925) and his predecessors (figs. 6–10). The question remains whether these photographs can legitimately serve as evidence for the original environment of the reverse glass paintings, which had been created more than seventy years earlier than the time when the images were taken. But even a cursory examination of the postcards demonstrates their values by pointing to additional locations where the paintings were once housed, such as the Salle des délibérations des Ministres and the Salle du Trône.[22]

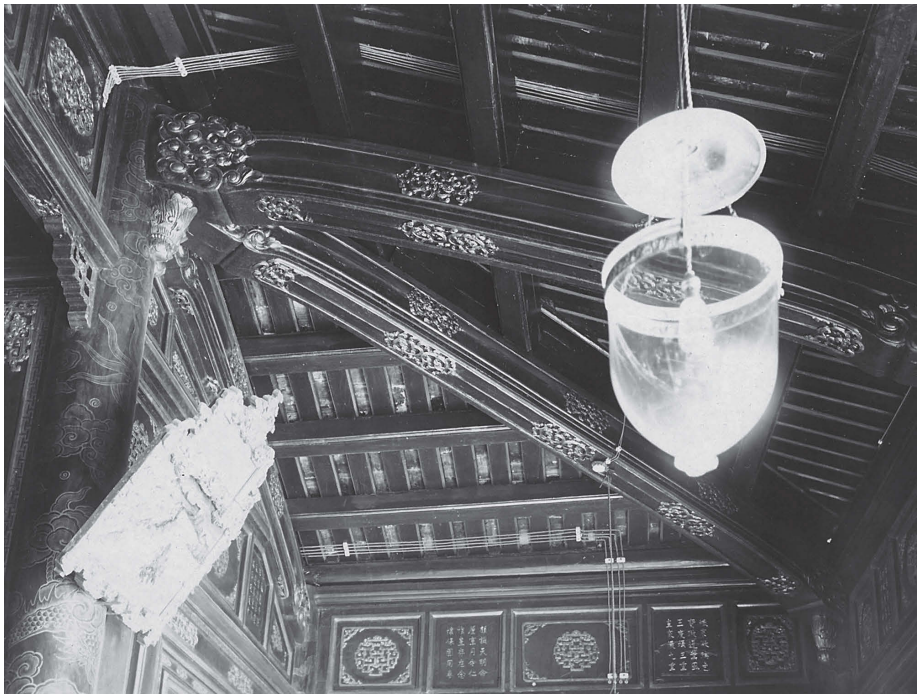
With a few exceptions, the reverse glass paintings in these photographs lack sufficient detail to be matched with extant examples. Clearly visible in the photographs, however, is the presence of various types of light fixtures. In order to recreate the environment and the function of the reverse glass paintings, interior lighting must be considered.



6 Khải Định at dinner, 1924, postcard, author's collection.



7 Interior of the Hall of Diligent Governance (Điện Cân Chánh), postcard, author's collection.



8 Hundi lantern at the Hall of Diligent Governance. Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac.

Like many traditional buildings in East Asia, the interiors of these structures were fairly dark. Features specific to Vietnamese wooden architecture such as the *trến* and *vì nóc*, which add a sense of height to the rafter, the low woven-mat-covered entrances to the building and the narrow-arcaded portico that keep the building cool during the hot summer months, all increase the depth of hollow darkness inside the hall. Artificial lights were crucial in generating a splendid imperial ambiance befitting a royal residence.

In the surviving photographs, several types of light fixtures, both native and European, can be seen densely hanging in the Hall of Diligent Governance (fig. 7). Four kerosene lamps, each evenly spaced, were attached to a large pillar by ornate curvilinear metal brackets. Each lamp included a brass reservoir and a doubled glass shade; the inner component was a long tube with a bulbous bottom to protect the flame, and the outer component was an opaque sphere that diffused the light. This silhouette of an elongated and slender form that is engorged to a large globe at the bottom was reiterated in the oversized Chinese-made porcelain vase at the base of each corresponding pillar, its sensuous curves continued down the legs of the wooden base. The second type of lamp was known as the Hundi lantern, characterized by the inverted bell jar shape in glass and topped with a smoke cover suspended above the wide opening (fig. 8). These were later rewired, as is visible in the photograph, for electric light bulbs. The glass for the Hundi lanterns was made in Europe and intended for the English market in colonial India.[23] A large intricate crystal chandelier hung in the center of the Hall, on either side is a traditional lantern of nearly the same height. These traditional lights

9 Traditional lantern at the Hall of Diligent Governance. Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac.

had important ritual functions within formal and sacred spaces. Like the reverse glass paintings nearby, these lanterns had clear glass panels with painted multicolored dragons, and most were updated with electricity by the early twentieth century (fig. 9).[24] By the 1930s, the electrification of the Hall was completed, and a formal Europeanized reception area has been installed. Though a large chandelier continued to dominate, the traditional lanterns on either side were eventually replaced with electric ceiling fans.

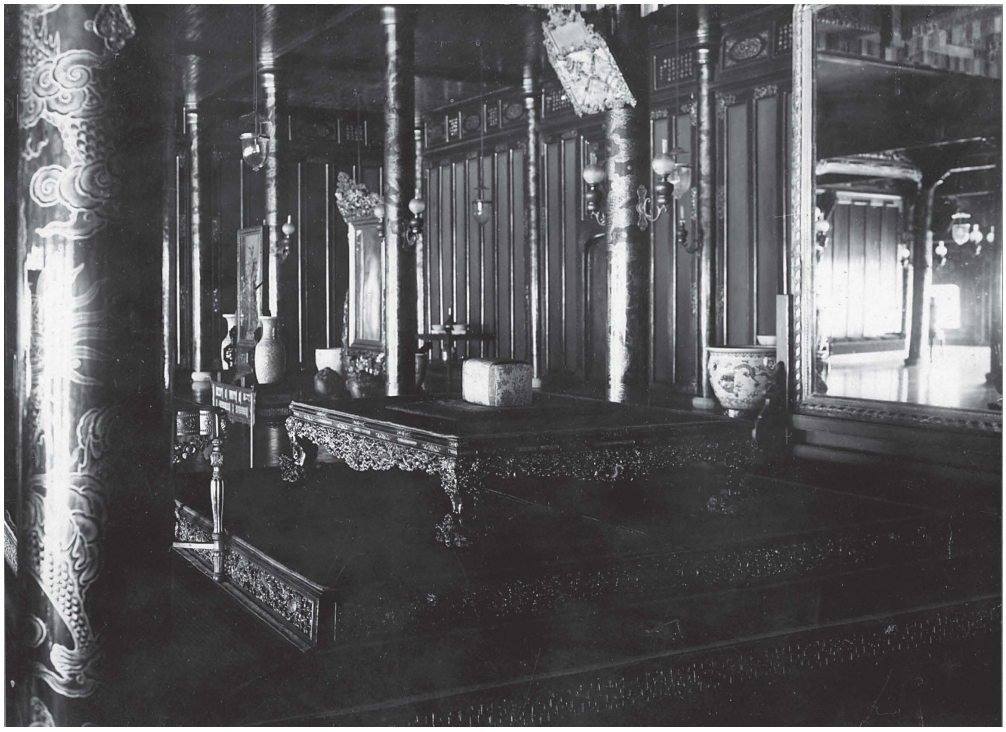
In *The Arcades Project* (1927–1940), Walter Benjamin included a selection of quotes and fragmentary thoughts on the appearance and effect of artificial lights in modern life. Whether it was oil, kerosene, gas, or eventually electric, artificial lights in Paris were tied to the experience of urbanism and capitalism. On the one hand, they improved the quality and quantity of public life, which for Benjamin, went hand-in-hand with revolutionary ideas.[25] On the other hand, they reaffirmed a particular bourgeois way of life, namely the enhancement of beauty of whichever surfaces the light touched, which had a profound impact on new ideals of feminine beauty.[26] As objects, lighting devices were loved and fetishized: Benjamin, for example, refers to the brass kerosene reservoir as a form of vase and the lights as the "rare flowers" in it.[27] With the assistance of the French colonial administration, the Hall of Diligent Governance and other imperial buildings became well-lit and electrified. The imperial residents relished what these new and modern European technologies of artificial lights and electric fans

could do to transform the visuality and microclimate of the interior. But more than being a simple change of interior design for the sake of bodily comfort, these changes remade the ritualized space, which had been designed according to Chinese cosmological principles, into a vision of modernity appropriate for a Vietnamese court under the rule of a European colonial power.

It is difficult for visitors today to imagine how these artificial lights would have transformed the dark interiors. Some of the photographs offer clues. In one, a profiled Emperor Khải Điện is seated for dinner at a European-style table (fig. 6). Hovering in the background are seemingly untethered orbs of intensely glowing light with undiscernible edges, shinning so brightly that they draw attention away from the sitter. "A dreamlike setting," wrote one French author in *The Arcades Project* on the visual effect of the artificial lights on the streets of Paris, "where the yellowish flickering of the gas is wedded to the lunar frigidity of electric light."[28] The same surreal quality of the artificial light appears to haunt both the streets of Paris and the interior of the Nguyễn court. A large mirror is visible behind the seated Khải Điện, reflecting at least one of these luminous orbs. Similar screen-mirrors were found in palace interiors, including at the Hall of Diligent Governance. Made of European sheet glasses, the expansive flat surfaces of the mirrors had a much greater reflective clarity than the traditional polished bronze mirrors of East Asia.

In addition to the large screen-mirrors, the interiors of imperial palaces were full of other surfaces with varying degrees of refractive index, further enhancing the "dreamlike setting." On his visit to the Hall of Diligent Governance, Robert de la Susse recalls that the pillars, the walls, and the ceilings were "encrusted with mother-of-pearl and ivory," and the hall exhibited a "profusion of porcelains."[29] With the eye of a connoisseur, he was able to differentiate between Kangxi period *famille verte*, celadon, and blue-and-white porcelain commissioned from China.[30] Enlivened by their vibrant and unique colors, their textured painted enamel surfaces, especially in the cases of *famille verte* and *famille rose* from China, evoked the palette used on reverse glass paintings and other decorative arts of the Nguyễn court.

The smooth screen-mirrors, the colorful relief-like porcelain, the transparent glass of the lanterns, the iridescent mother-of-pearl inlays, the polished bronze vessels, the deep red lacquers with gilded details, and the multilayered paintings on the reverse glass were all pressed into service to project, refract, reflect, magnify, and entangle the different types of light inside the Hall. Some of the lights would be flickering, others buzzing; some would be yellow, others would be frigid; all working together to create a visually complex, dizzying, and dazzling ritual space. This scene was not one that the Europeans likely noticed or appreciated, since neither glasses nor lights are mentioned in the travel guides; like the electrification of the Fez *medina* in another French colony, Morocco, from the same time period, the intrusion of modernity did not fit the romanticized "Orientalist" vision expected by the colonial visitors.[31] Ironically, while Benjamin saw the artificial light as a potential medium to foster a productive public space for the common people, in the context of the Nguyễn court the same types of



10 A large screen-mirror at one of the Forbidden City palaces, Huế, Vietnam, postcard, author's collection.

artificial light demarcated an exclusive space reserved for the emperor and his guests, keeping out the common Vietnamese people and even ordinary foreign visitors.
Lastly, mirrors were an essential ingredient in the creation of this resplendent interior, both as pieces of furniture and as a metaphor (fig. 10). The placement of the oversized mirrors inside of imperial palaces not only enhanced the spatial depth of the interior space, they also served as screens behind the sitter. In East Asia, screens have multiple functions in an interior space. It frames and enlarges the person seated in front, and the pictorial content of the screen is intimately tied to the identity of the sitter.[32] For example, in the nineteenth-century Korea, screens depicting "books and things" (*chaekgeori*) became popular among the literati class to express the owner's identity as a learned Confucian.[33] There was no representational content on the screen mirrors. The clear, flat, and smooth surface signals to the audience that the person seated in front should behave and act reflectively upon the deeds of his predecessors and past moral paradigms, the precise lessons the emperors in China and Vietnam were asked to learn in reading the narratives from *Emperor's Mirror, An Illustrated Discussion* in books, woodblock prints, and reverse glass paintings.

Conclusion

For the Nguyễn court, China and France provided two civilizing models of legitimization.[34] While the content of the paintings reveals the Confucian-based constructed

ideology that formed the basis of Nguyễn rulership in the first half of the nineteenth century, Chinese reverse glass painting and other Chinese decorative arts at the court such as blue-and-white porcelain and painted enamel overtly express the cultivated Sinophilic taste of their patrons. Later in the early twentieth century, when the courtly taste had been shifted to an urbane sophistication under the French colonial rule, reverse glass painting became another reflective surface for modern illumination. Central to both periods was the multivalence in the medium of glass—as a surface, as a transparency, as a decorative element, as a text, as a protective cover, as a background, as an empty space, as a picture, as a European technology, and as a Chinese product.

Let me conclude with another passage from the Romont catalog that began the essay, where the authors described the interactive experience of seeing a reverse glass painting:

> [I]t is the glass support that is first seen by the viewer – and often he sees the reflections from this hard, yet fragile, material rather than the image. In order to perceive the picture, he must patiently direct his gaze through the glass to the painted back surface. The paint layer appears as smooth as the glass itself, the thickness of the modelling barely visible; the colours are sharp and brilliant, protected as they have been by the glass from direct and the ravages of time.[35]

What makes reverse glass painting special is the fact that it is both a painted surface and a reflective surface: a painting and a mirror. Not only are the two not mutually exclusive, but viewers also need to constantly negotiate between the two experiences. By focusing on the materiality and the viewing of reverse glass painting, this essay attempts to return the paintings back to their original context of the Nguyễn court with their accrued significations: as imperial decorative objects, as exotic Chinese objects, as commemorative objects, as didactic objects, and finally as part of the interior design to optimize the modern experience of illumination.

1 Jolidon/Ryser 2007, 8.

2 I would like to thank the organizers and Vitromusée Romont and Vitrocentre Romont for the incredibly productive conference right before the COVID-19 lockdown. I would also like to thank Caroline Herbelin, Ellen Huang, and Patricia Berger for reading the draft and their insightful comments. Finally, this research has been made possible with funding from the Site and Space in Southeast Asia program: https://www.siteandspace.org/

3 I have personally visited most of these sites, but references to new sites continue to appear in guidebooks and online. For example, see Doling 2018, 166.

4 For a recent sale of two reverse glass paintings from the Nguyễn dynasty, see Trouvé 2018.

5 Patterson 2016, 153. Similar types of Chinese-made reverse glass paintings depicting *bogu* motifs in Bangkok temples discussed by Patterson were also found in the Hue Antiquities Museum Collection.

6 These were sometimes known by the ambiguous and confusing term of "bleu de Hue." See Truong 1997, 396–401.

7 A more in-depth discussion of the paintings' origin will appear in a future article.

8 This has been argued by many scholars. On law, for example, see Lockhart 2001, 32–33.

9 See Mayer 2018, 16; Crossman 1991, 203; and Audric 2020, 52.

10 Cooke 1997, 274.

11 See Cooke 1997.
12 See Murray 2007, 4. Like the early Nguyễn emperors, *The Emperor's Mirror* became an important early educational text for another young emperor, that of Meiji in Japan, after the abolition of the shoguns and the imperial family assumed direct control in 1869. See Murray 2001, 89.
13 Vu 2015, 104.
14 All references of Hall of Supreme Harmony poems are from Huỳnh 1994. "Sunray," as 日暉 see 34; as 日輝 see 40; as 日耀, see 36 and 105; as 離明, see 53; and as 化日, see 62. "Light of the morning sun," as 曙光 see 51; and as 曙色 see 99.
15 All references from Huỳnh. "Light" as a noun, for 光輝 see 40; for 光明 see 70. For 天下 see 62; for 千古 see 63; for 天德 see 81; for 南服 see 97; and for 前業 see 99.
16 All references from Huỳnh. For 煌煌南極照see 64; for 離照光明下see 70; and for 閣日照螭頭 see 160.
17 De la Susse 1913, 21. On the conflict, see Vu 2015, 106.
18 Cao 1909.
19 See De la Susse 1913, 21; and Doling 2018, 137.
20 De la Susse discusses in his article some of the objects in vitrines on display at a museum in the imperial building accessible to the public.
21 *Guide Touristique* 1937, 137.
22 The Salle des délibérations des Ministres was likely La Salle du Conseil Secret (Co-Mat-Phong) in a small building attached to the Hall of Diligent Governance. The Salle de Trône was likely the Hall of Supreme Harmony. See Laborde 1928, 155.
23 See Eron Johnson Antiques.
24 Huỳnh 2016, 175.
25 See Benjamin's quotation of Sigmund Engländer for example. Benjamin et al. 2002, 566
26 For an American discussion on the effects of electric light and feminine beauty and identity, see Petty 2014. For Benjamin's French example on gas light and female beauty, see his quotation of Eduard Kroloff in Benjamin et al. 2002, 563.
27 Benjamin 2002, 564.
28 Citing George Montorgueil, *Paris au Hasard* (Paris, 1895), 65 in Benjamin et al. 2002, 562.
29 De la Susse 1913, 21.
30 De la Susse 1913, 22.
31 See Apelian 2012, 178. In comparison to the electrified mosque lamps installed at the historical monuments and tourist attractions in French colonial Fez during the same period, the French colonial government did not have control in the aesthetic agenda of the Nguyễn court.
32 For more on the function of the screen, see Wu 1996.
33 See Kim 2014.
34 I thank Caroline Herbelin for noting this connection.
35 Jolidon/Ryser 2007, 8.

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TRANSFER AND TRANSMEDIALITY

5

GLASS PAINTING IN THE COLLECTION OF ANDREAS EVERARDUS VAN BRAAM HOUCKGEEST (1739–1801)

Jan van Campen

Abstract

Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest had a long career as a Dutch East India Company merchant in China. During his last tenure in Canton (1790–1795) he assembled a large collection of Chinese objects and paintings. Among these were four glass paintings, which are now in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Two are diligent and well executed copies after European prints, the other two seem to be the result of a successful collaboration of a painter and a patron, incorporating various models in order to create an intricate visual program.

Keywords

Canton, painting, Dutch East India Company

The subject of this paper is a group of four reverse glass paintings from the collection of the Dutch East India Company merchant Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest (1739–1801).[1] The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has been able to acquire the reverse glass paintings through the mediation of Kee Il Choi in 2003 and 2005. They were bought from the direct descendants of Andreas Everardus and we are relatively well informed about Van Braam, about his life, his ambitions, and his achievements in China. It is rare and fortunate to be so informed about the first owner of a Chinese work of art and this is a good reason to zoom in on this little group of works. As we shall see, this group of four paintings embodies two essential aspects of art production in Canton during the second half of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, it is the ability of the workshops to produce attractive objects for surprisingly little money, following exactly the instructions and models provided by a patron. On the other hand, it is the more interesting artistic process of a Chinese workshop combining various models, investigating Chinese and European visual languages, painterly traditions and practices, probably in collaboration with a European patron.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110711776-007

1 *Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest*, 1790–1795, oil on canvas, 60×45 cm, Private Collection.

Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest

But let's start with some information on the proud collector and first owner: Van Braam Houckgeest (fig. 1).[2] Van Braam was born in 1739 in a small village in the middle of the Dutch Republic. His father had a shop trading in East Asian commodities, so he was introduced to Asia at a young age. Many family members joined the Navy, but Andreas Everardus preferred a career with the Dutch East India Company (the VOC). Between 1758 and 1773 he traveled to China three times, steadily climbing the ranks. The last time he stayed over for a period of eight years in Canton and Macao before returning to the Netherlands. Sailing home on his second voyage, he met his wife Catharina Cornelia Geertruida van Reede van Oudtshoorn (1746–1799) at the Cape of Good Hope. They married in 1763.

Van Braam was well-known as a China enthusiast and collector of Chinese items, but there are no traces of any collecting activities in this early period—the period of the three voyages during 1758–1773. From 1773 onward, he lived the life of a gentleman-farmer in the Netherlands and then in the United States. The family moved to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1783. But the years in the US turned out to be a personal and financial disaster. Four of his five children died during an outbreak of diphtheria

and Van Braam faced bad luck in business, ending up bankrupt. He returned to the Netherlands with his wife and a newborn girl, where he once again joined the VOC and became the director of the Dutch settlement in Canton in 1790. He amazed many experienced members of the European community in Canton China hands by arriving burdened with debts, which in a very short time he managed to change into a substantial fortune.[3] In 1793, Van Braam wrote to his daughter that he had saved enough money for a decent living for the rest of his days and that he was preparing his return.[4] But then, suddenly, there was an opportunity to join the well-known Dutch embassy at court in Beijing to congratulate Qianlong on his 60th -year anniversary as emperor.[5] The embassy was led by the experienced VOC official Isaac Titsingh (1745–1812). Van Braam traveled in his own time and there was an agreement that he would replace the ambassador in case Titsingh died. The embassy journey provided a unique opportunity to see more of China than the small part of Guangzhou where the Western merchants were allowed to stay. The journey took half a year (end of 1794–beginning 1795) and it was an overwhelming experience: to see a large part of the empire, to meet so many people, the court rituals, etc.

Thanks to this voyage, Van Braam could distinguish himself as a prominent China specialist. He collected notes and sketches that, with the help of the editor Médéric Louis Elie Moreau de Saint-Mery (1750–1819), he turned into a two volume travel journal published in Philadelphia in 1797–1798.[6] At the same time, he started to build up elaborate collections: a very extensive collection of watercolor paintings and other visual material, which can be seen as an annex to the journal, a visual component and proof of truthfulness of his writings. The second part of the collection was decorative.[7] Van Braam wanted to be a China specialist, but he also liked to present himself as a real gentleman. Interestingly, a lot of the decorative materials he collected didn't look very Chinese. A large part of the decorative objects were made in the European style, faithfully following European models.

After his last stay in China, Van Braam didn't return to the Netherlands; he went to Philadelphia instead, where he built a mansion called China Retreat. There he installed his collections and for a short time lived the high life he was fond of, served by five Chinese servants. Unfortunately, financial problems kept haunting him, so he had to leave Philadelphia and went to London, where he had to sell off his collection, ending his days in Amsterdam. Christie's sold the collection in 1799 and most items were dispersed all over the world. A sad truth, which was alleviated to some extend by the Christie's sale catalog, a very early single-owner auction catalogue, with accurate descriptions of 114 catalog entries, many containing several paintings and artworks.[8]

Fortunately, upon his return from China, Van Braam had presented a group of objects and paintings, the four glass paintings discussed in this article among them, to his eldest daughter, Everarda Catharina Sophia (1765–1816), who had survived the horrors of diphtheria and bankruptcy and stayed in the United States, where she married and became the ancestress of the many Van Braam Houckgeest descendants in the United States.

2a *Pastoral Scene*, ca. 1795, reverse glass painting, 33.5 × 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, AK-RAK-2003-6-B.

2b *Pastoral Scene*, ca. 1795, reverse glass painting, 33.5 × 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, AK-RAK-2003-6-A.

2c Louis Simon Lempereur, after François Boucher, *Silvie guérit Philis de la piqûre d'une Abeille*, etching and engraving, 43.2 × 45.5 cm, Musée du Louvre.

2d Louis Simon Lempereur, after François Boucher, *L'amour ranime Aminte dans les bras de Silvie*, etching and engraving, 42.8 × 45.2 cm, Musée du Louvre.

The Ovals

As mentioned before, Canton workshops were appreciated for their ability to closely follow European examples and to produce attractive artworks for relatively little money. Two oval glass paintings from Van Braam's collection belong to this group. They have been painted after prints by Louis Simon Lempereur (1728–1808), made after paintings by François Boucher (1703–1770) (figs. 2 a–d).

Van Braam owned a big group of paintings after European models. The 1799 auction catalog mentions a group of paintings, 29 lots (54 items) of which, according to the entries, 29 were after European prints. According to the catalog, they were "entirely executed by Chinese artists with a singular degree of delicacy and finishing, … beautiful specimens of the progress of the fine arts in China."[9] This note suggests that, for the Christie's cataloger and probably for his envisaged clientele, "progress of the fine

3 *Catharina Cornelia Geertruida van Braam Houckgeest, née Van Reede van Oudtshoorn*, ca. 1795, reverse glass painting, 63.5 × 49 cm, Rijksmuseum, AK-RAK-2007-6.

4 Thomas Burke, after Angelika Kauffmann, *Lady Rushout and Daughter*, 1784, crayon in red, 42.7 × 32,4 cm, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-2006-137.

arts" means the ability of the Chinese painters to make his work look as European as possible. This opinion is further enhanced by a visitor to China Retreat, Count Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1757–1841), who commented likewise after admiring the collections. He wrote: "what surprised me most, was a copy of the celebrated Venus by Titian of Florence, made in China by a Chinese, with an exactness of which they themselves alone are capable ... very precious here, very pretty, made in China at a very low price; labor is considered as nothing there."[10]

It would be naïve to believe that it really wasn't possible to see the Chinese origin of these objects and artworks. Crucial was the sense of control over China experienced in the West and expressed in these artworks: European and American patrons could control to what extent the Chinese origin was visible. A collection like Van Braam's in China Retreat conveyed many messages and "control" must have been a prominent one.

Catharina van Braam Houckgeest

Apart from these direct copies, Cantonese painters were able to incorporate Western models in a more creative process. A portrait of Mrs. Van Braam is a good example (fig. 3). Catharina is portrayed with her youngest daughter Françoise Constantia Carolina Maria (born in 1785). The painter used Thomas Burke's stipple engraving from 1784 (fig. 4). Burke (1749–1815) made his engraving after a painting by the most fashionable

5 *Catharina Cornelia Geertruida van Braam Houckgeest, née Van Reede van Oudtshoorn*, ca. 1790, reverse glass painting, 55.4 × 45.2 cm, Rijksmuseum, AK-RAK-2003-7.

painter of the time, Angelika Kauffmann (1741–1807): "Lady Rushout and her daughter, Anne" from 1773.[11] There are a few minor adaptions: the format, of course, and the fact that Catharina looks in the other direction, for example. Most probably this had to do with a model that Van Braam could provide: a medallion or any other likeness of his wife he had brought with him to Canton.[12] The hairdo, however, is that of Lady Rushout, so the painter used this detail, mirrored, from the print. The girl just follows the print—probably Van Braam didn't have any portrait of her and certainly not of her at the age he needed for this painting.

Portrait of a Marriage

The most intricate painting in the group of four is another portrait of Catharina (fig. 5).[13] In this work a large number of models and concepts are combined in an intriguing way. We see an allegorical figure who is holding a medallion with Catharina's portrait. Since the upper part of the work is a mirror, Mrs. Van Braam looks the viewer in the eye, but this viewer sees his or her own reflection at the same time. The notion of the eyes being the mirror of the soul is, and has been, well known. Of the many, who commented on the relation between eyes and heart or soul, was Franciscus Junius (1591–1677),

6 Catharina's portrait with Andreas's reflection.

one of the first writers on the painting theory. In 1641, he wrote: "our face is a visage of our thoughts, a mirror and the book of our hearts."[14] There is also the famous biblical text about love by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, where he says: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face."[15] This mirror presented Van Braam the opportunity to look into his wife's eyes and soul and, through a mirror, into his own (fig. 6). If we look at the painting and reflection together, we see an intimate depiction of a marriage. Catharina is sitting here holding her husband's letter, looking up at him, for now just at his reflection, but she radiates the confidence that soon, when he has finished his business, they will see each other face to face again. I think it is safe to say that there is a real program in this painting and that the program works best as long Van Braam is away from home. For that reason, I assume that the painting has been ordered and made immediately after Van Braam's arrival in China in 1790 and had a place in his private quarters in Canton.

Let's have a look at the models and see how they fit in the grand program. The allegorical figure is copied from a print by Jacobus Houbraken (1698–1780) with the portrait of the Amsterdam burgomaster Lieve Geelvinck (1698–1743) (fig. 7). His likeness (without the allegorical lady) had been used as a model for the decoration of a tea service in the 1760s.[16] In the Geelvinck's print the lady has the elements referring to vigilance;

7 Jacobus Houbraken after Jan Wandelaar, *Lieve Geelvinck*, engraving, 36.4 × 23.4 cm, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-1937–1146.

in the glass painting this has been adapted. Now an anchor (hope) and palm leaves (triumph, but also Asia) are added. For the central oval the same model has been used as in the previous painting. But this is true only for the face and the hair. The hairdo reflects the fashion of about 1765–1770, the period of Van Braam's marriage. The V-shape of the dress starts to appear around 1780 and the little cord is even later.[17] This suggests that there must have been a generic model in the studio of a reading lady that the painter could use and adapt just a little to personalize it. And indeed, several paintings of this subject and with this exact pose are known.[18]

The allegorical figure of Hope is sitting on a stone balustrade with the coats of arms of Van Braam Houckgeest and Van Oudtshoorn on the one side and on the other side a farewell scene. Unfortunately, I couldn't find the model for this scene, but my colleagues in the Rijksmuseum print room are convinced that it is Dutch. Based on the depicted scene: a lamenting woman is supported by a second one and a ship is sailing away, one might suggest it to be an illustration of Aeneas leaving Dido. "Vota sequuntur euntem" (My best wishes go with him) is a motto from a book first published in 1691, *Devises et Emblèmes* by Daniel de la Feuille (1640–1709). The combination of this motto and this scene is unrecorded, however.

8 Detail from a map of Asia by Johann Matthias Hase, 1744, engraving, Leiden University Library, collection Bodel Nijenhuis.

Other visual elements in the image also seem to be chosen with care. The stone balustrade is well known from Dutch portrait engravings—there must have been examples available in Canton at the time, as was the case with the Geelvinck's portrait. The incense burner is of interest too. Though incense burners are well-known both in China and the West, this shape is European, and the large cloud of incense smoke is common in European imagery and not in Chinese. A lady with an incense burner is a well-known emblem indicating Asia.[19] She often appears in decorative corners of maps of Asia (fig. 8). By adorning her seat, the carpet adds status to "Hope" and, at the same time, it cleverly works as a theater curtain for the scene below, a rather common feature in Chinese genre painting for a Western clientele in the later eighteenth century. It is hard to say something definitive on the origin of the carpet. The decorative motifs seem to suggest Persia. Persian carpets were sought after commodities and traded by the VOC and its employees through the Indian VOC settlements; there were tight commercial connections between India and China in the second half of the eighteenth century. The VOC had used Persian carpets as diplomatic gifts in the past and probably Titsingh and Van Braam also brought two of them on their embassy trip to the emperor in 1795: among the gifts were "two modern floor carpets."[20] The VOC head-

quarters in Batavia had to collect all necessary goods and presents for the embassy on short notice, which also meant nearby. For that reason, European carpets are improbable and Persian carpets were, as stated, the most prestigious among the Asian carpets the VOC had access to.
If we take the various meanings and messages of the visual elements of the painting into consideration, our understanding of the portrait can be more detailed. It evinces not just a confident and even spiritual connection between the Van Braams, but more explicitly the desire and hope that the Asian voyage will result in a happy reunion.

Reflection and Illusion: A Shared Interest

This is an exceptional object and, of course, we would love to know how it emerged, how it developed: what was the role of the painter, what was the role of the patron, not just for the cunning combination of models but especially for the use of illusion and reflection.[21] We don't know, and we can only say that working with the concept of reflection, the mirror or a secondary image (an image incorporated in another image) had its roots both in China and Europe. In Europe it was not uncommon to include a painted image within a painting.[22] It may represent a family member who had passed away or an absent lover. *Young Lady with Letter and Medallion* by Casper Netscher, for instance, depicts a young lady sitting at her table: she is looking at us, holding a medallion in one hand, a letter in the other.[23] There are several similarities to the Van Braam portrait, but—even though there is a mirror on her table—it lacks the most important element, the incorporation of the reflected image within the total composition. Of the many Ladies at their dressing table, Francois Boucher's portrait of Madame de Pompadour is one of the most famous.[24] It has been remarked that Pompadour's gaze is so direct that the portrait pretends to be the mirror image she was looking at, just before she turned her head.[25] Reflection and illusory space turns out to be an essential issue of this painting, just like the Van Braam's portrait in which the viewer (e.g., Andreas Everardus) could decide whether or not to participate in the composition and, hence, in the narrative of the painting.
Chinese artists were fascinated by illusion and reflection as well. Thanks to Lihong Liu's publications we are well informed about this.[26] A famous and early example is a detail in the *Admonitions Scroll* in the British Museum, an eighth-century copy of a fourth-century painting, in which we see the reflection of one of the ladies in her mirror.[27] More intriguing is a seventeenth-century print in the Museum of Asian Art in Cologne, an episode from the *Romance of the West Chamber* in which a lady is reading a letter.[28] She herself is invisible, because she is sitting behind the screen, but we can see her reflection in the mirror. The artist drags us into an "Alice in Wonderland"-like imagined world. An idea, which is further enhanced by her intent reading—she is imagining a world that we, the viewers, are tempted to try and enter; again, another level of illusion. In his famous letter on glass painting dated 1741, Jean Denis Attiret (1702–1768) wrote that painted mirrors were highly appreciated in China because

one's own reflection could appear within the painted composition of the mirror, in other words, one became part of the composition.[29] This is exactly the trick of Van Braam's portrait mirror.

The introduction of these few examples of Chinese and European artworks has been to show that there was a keen interest for reflection, illusion, and secondary portraiture both in China and the West. I think this shared interest provided good conditions for a cooperation between a Chinese painting workshop and a European patron, a cooperation that resulted in Catharina Van Braam's very remarkable portrait.

1 This article is based on my earlier publications in Dutch: Van Campen 2005 (1) and Van Campen 2005 (2).
2 For biographical data, see Van Braam Houckgeest 1997 and Barnsley 1989–1991. Dawn Odell (Lewis & Clark College, Portland, OR, US) is preparing a biography on Van Braam; Recently, two books have been published on the Dutch embassy 1794-1795 by Nanet van Braam Houckgeest and Tonio Andrade.
3 Lequin 2005, 238.
4 Published in Lee 1984, 81.
5 Lequin 2005.
6 Van Braam Houckgeest 1797–1798.
7 Carpenter 1974.
8 Catalogue 1799.
9 *Catalogue* 1799, nos. 28–55; the citation immediately preceding no. 28. Cf. Choi 2018, 122–123.
10 Quoted in Barnsley 1989–1991, vol. I, 175; this painting is no 43 (first day) of the 1799 sale.
11 Baumgärtel 2018, no. 48. The Burke print: no. 49; no. 52 for the same motif (mother and child) incorporated in a group portrait of the royal family of Naples. Johann Lorenz Kreul the Elder (1765–1840) faithfully followed the composition in his pastel portrait of Louise Duchess de Württemberg (1764-1828) with son Paul (1797–1860) (private collection, Christie's London, 25 March 1999, no. 340, as "Mother and child"). Another Chinese glass painting (entirely) after Burke is less sophisticated in brushwork and details (Bukowski International Auction 25 November 2008, no. 1914) and for that reason is considered to be a follow up of the Van Braam portrait.
12 It is not recorded but it seems safe to assume Van Braam carried a memento of his wife.
13 This portrait was recently published: Cao 2019, 90–91.
14 Junius 1641, 282; cited by De Jongh 1986, 20.
15 King James translation has: "through a glass, darkly."
16 Cf. Jörg 1997, cat.no. 325. I'm grateful to Jef Schaeps, curator of the Leiden University print room who recognized the Houbraken print model.
17 I'm grateful to my colleague at the Rijksmuseum, Bianca du Mortier, curator for fashion, for this information.
18 I'm grateful to Kee Il Choi who brought these paintings to my attention. Cf. Howard/Ayers 1978, vol. II, no. 674.
19 Ripa 1644, vol. 2, 6. This Paris edition has an illustration that is more like the Van Braam painting than other editions.
20 Lequin 2005, 213, "List of Gifts."
21 A similar glass painting—this time the medallion is a mirror, maybe replacing a lost portrait—was incorporated into a Chinese cabinet on a stand. Chinese Porcelain Company 1995, no. 47; Sotheby's New York, 7 April 2004, no. 198. Based on the style of cabinet this painting has been dated ca. 1785, preceding the Van Braam portrait. However, the difference in the quality of the brushwork suggests the Van Braam portrait being the original and the cabinet painting being the copy. Furniture styles are known to last a long time in Canton.
22 Craft-Giepmans/de Vries 2012.

23 Craft-Giepmans/de Vries 2012, no. 31.
24 I'm grateful to Kee Il Choi who drew my attention to this well-researched portrait. I based my information mainly on Gordon/Hensick 2002.
25 Gordon/Hensick 2002, 25.
26 Liu 2015, 2016, and her contribution to this volume. See also Kleutghen 2015.
27 https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/admonitions-instructress-court-ladies (last accessed 3 July 2020). In the Dunhuang caves is a similar composition: a gentleman and his reflection in a round mirror on a tripod are both part of the composition. I'm grateful to Ching-Ling Wang, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, for these references.
28 Liu 2015, 198.
29 Audric 2020, 160.

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6

THE GOVERNOR OF SURAT AND THE APOTHEOSIS OF WASHINGTON

CANTONESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS FOR EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN MARKETS

Karina H. Corrigan

Abstract

Cantonese trade painters catered to diverse global markets in the early nineteenth century. American consumers of Chinese reverse glass paintings acquired works that were popular throughout the British Empire, but also commissioned works that spoke to their status as a newly independent nation. This article considers a group of Chinese reverse glass paintings with early American provenances and themes through selections from the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum, one of the United States' earliest museums.

Keywords

East India Marine Society, Salem, American trade in China, George Washington, Tilly Kettle, Masonic, Chinese export art, Peabody Essex Museum

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An Early American Museum Collection

From 1784 to 1814, more than 600 American ships journeyed to China, a period that coincided with a vibrant period of production of reverse glass paintings in China.[1] Under British rule, American merchants had not been permitted to trade directly with Asia, so within months of the nation's founding, multiple ships set out to capitalize on the new financial opportunities their independence afforded them. The first ship, New York's *Empress of China*, arrived in Canton in 1784, with additional ships following in 1786 from New York, Philadelphia, and Salem. These vessels and the hundreds that followed them brought back large quantities of tea, porcelain, and silk as well as other

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luxury goods in lesser quantities to the new nation. In the early years of the Republic, import duties on Asian goods represented a substantial portion of the country's budget. In 1799, at a moment when Salem was arguably the wealthiest city *per capita* in the United States, a group of sea captains in the city formed the East India Marine Society, which would become one of the foundational institutions of the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM). Reflecting Salem's global reach during this period, the membership in the East India Marine Society (EIMS) was limited to those Salem captains and supercargoes (business managers of the vessel) who had navigated the seas beyond the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn. The Society further articulated that its members should "form a Museum of natural and artificial curiosities, particularly such as are to be found beyond the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn."[2] The EIMS collections are global in scope, including extraordinary early caches of material from Oceania, the Northwest coast of North America, and Asia; China, Japan, and India are particularly well represented. Roughly a third of the over 6,000 objects collected in the early nineteenth century are preserved in PEM's collection. The Society's early collection included at least one reverse glass painting, most likely made in China.

Additional works from China, Japan, and India, many with histories of ownership in the early nineteenth century, were preserved in the historic collections of the Essex Institute, which was founded in Salem in 1821. The merger of these two institutions to form the Peabody Essex Museum in 1992 consolidated these historic collections of Asian export art. However, the museum's international stature in this area is due to the transfer of 9,000 works of art from the China Trade Museum in Milton, Massachusetts in 1984 and concerted strategic acquisitions over the last thirty-five years.[3] Currently, the Peabody Essex Museum's collection includes more than sixty Cantonese trade reverse glass paintings. This contribution highlights a selection of that group, many of which have early American provenances or were made specifically for the American market.

The Collection's First Reverse Glass Painting

The first reverse glass painting acquired by the East India Marine Society was "a [gilt framed picture] of the Governor of Surat" donated in 1825 by Society member Nathan Cook (1783–1827) (fig. 1). Cook was Captain of the ship *Erin* on her voyages to India and China from 1817 to 1819 and joined the East India Marine Society in 1820, shortly after his return from Asia. He likely acquired this portrait of the governor during that voyage.[4] Unlike the majority of the reverse glass paintings in PEM's collection, this work was probably based on an Indian miniature painting rather than a European print. Inscriptions in Urdu and Gujurati are incorporated into the reverse painting above the figures, identifing the seated figure as "Nawab Namdar Tegh Beg Khan Bahadur," likely a portrait of Teg Bakht Khān, who ruled Surat from 1733 to 1746.[5] The Urdu inscription in the reverse painting also bears the Hijri date for 1206, which corresponds to 1790–1791, perhaps when the source painting was executed. Chinese artists were

1 Artists in Guangzhou, China. Portrait of Nawab Namdar Teg Bakht Khan Bahadur and a servant, 1790–1791, after an Indian miniature, reverse glass painting, 44.5 × 65 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Gift of Nathan Cook, 1825, E9942 (EIMS#384).

extremely adept at copying lettering from the many English prints they reproduced in reverse glass, despite not reading what they copied, so it seems plausible that the artist could have similarly reproduced these Urdu and Gujurati inscriptions from an Indian miniature.

Interestingly, the Urdu inscription in this reverse painting is masterfully executed, but grammatically awkward, which may point to it having been added to the source image by a non-native speaker who could write in Urdu and Gujurati. Many East India Company officials stationed in India learned to read and write local languages to facilitate their work for the company. But was this reverse painting executed in China? Stylistically, it is substantially different from most other works dating to the first quarter of the nineteenth century, but that may reflect the origin and nature of the source image. For example, the representation of the bolster on which Teg Bakht Khān leans is unconvincing, as if the painter did not entirely understand what he was replicating in reverse glass. Similarly, the muslin textiles the figures wear are less fully realized than we might expect from an artist directly familiar with them.

Framing Cantonese Reverse Glass Paintings

What is certain is that the painting survives in a Neoclassical-style carved and gilded frame with through-tenons that are typical of Chinese construction (fig. 2). The tell-tale rectangular through-tenons on the sides of a reverse glass picture frame can often be

2 Detail of Fig. 1, showing a through tenon on a corner of the miter-jointed Chinese export frame.

a helpful clue to consider more carefully the origins of an unattributed painting. Chinese reverse glass paintings survive in their original frames more frequently than their counterparts done in oil on canvas. When subsequent generations of owners considered reframing reverse glass works to reflect changing tastes, the fragility of the medium may have dissuaded them from the alteration. It seems likely that this painting and its accompanying gilded frame were executed by Chinese artists, most likely in Guangzhou, after a miniature painting Nathan Cook had acquired while in India. But we should also consider whether there was a community of Chinese carpenters in Surat who could have created the frame for an Indian reverse glass painting.

Lord Cornwallis, Tipu Sultan, and American Audiences

Two other reverse glass paintings in PEM's collection feature Indian noblemen. Unlike the painting of the Governor of Surat, both of these pictures were based directly on British print sources and both were unquestionably painted in Guangzhou. Tipu Sultan (r. 1782 to 1799), the ruler of Mysore, was noted worldwide as a gifted military commander and one of the East India Company's most ardent adversaries. Prints related to Tipu's conflicts in the late eighteenth century with the British under the command

3 Artists in Guangzhou, China. *The Departure of the Sons of Tippoo from the Zenana,* after 1793, after a print by Francesco Bartolozzi, 1793, after a painting by Mather Brown, 1792, reverse glass painting, 52 × 65.7 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Museum purchase, made possible by an anonymous donor, 1977, E80263.

of Lord Cornwallis (1738–1805) were among the most widely distributed depictions of India in the period. A painting by Boston-born artist Mather Brown (1761–1831) of a dramatic moment in these conflicts—Cornwallis's taking of Tipu's sons as hostages in 1792—served as the source for Francesco Bartolozzi's (1727–1815) widely-distributed print of the event.[6] Bartolozzi's print, in turn, served as the direct source for the Cantonese reverse glass painting in fig. 3. Cantonese painters produced multiple reverse glass paintings based on prints of Tipu's defeats, some of which were destined for American households. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Captain Andrew Blanchard (1764–1857) brought home to Medford, Massachusetts, a pair of Cantonese reverse glass paintings depicting Cornwallis's 1792 treaty negotiations with Tipu Sultan.[7] Prior to Cornwallis's appointment in 1786 as Governor-General of India and Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces, he had led British troops against the American colonists; his surrender at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781 effectively ended the American Revolutionary war. Given Americans' own recent conflicts with Cornwallis and the British, American consumers likely read these images of Tipu Sultan's defeat quite differently that their British counterparts. Indeed, Salem readers had avidly followed his resistance against the British in the local papers as early as 1769 and the *Salem Gazette* published news of Tipu's defeat in 1792 on the front page.[8]

4 Artists in Guangzhou, China. Shuja-ud-Daula and His Sons, after 1797, after a print by P. & E. Renault, 1797, after a painting by Tilly Kettle, 1772, reverse glass painting, 76.8 × 58.7 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Museum purchase, made possible by an anonymous donor, and gift of Jeremy Ltd., London, 1996, AE85329.

A print dedicated "To The Most Noble Charles, Marquis Corwallis / Late Governor General of all the British possessions in the East Indies" by Emmanuel Xavier Renault de Saint-Germain (1746–1801) served as the source for a Chinese reverse glass painting depicting Shuja-ud-Daula, nawab of Awadh (Oudh) and his sons, the only recorded example of this image in reverse glass (fig. 4).[9] The Chinese artist has faithfully replicated the entire dedication on the Renault print into a wide red band at the base of the image and additionally incorporated a blue border with gold stars, absent on the engraving. Renault's print was, in turn, based on a large oil painting by Tilly Kettle (1735–1786), the first prominent British artist to work extensively in India. From 1768 to 1776, Kettle lived and worked in Madras and Calcutta, where he painted for the British expatriate community and Indian nobility.[10] In 1772, Shuja-ud-Daula commissioned Kettle to paint a portrait of himself with his sons, possibly intended as a gift for King George III (r. 1760–1820). East India Company officials encouraged the exchange of portraits as an alternative to traditional Mughal tribute gifts and Kettle painted a number of images of Shuja-ud-Daula while he resided at the Nawab's court in Faisabad.[11]

5 Artists in Guangzhou, China. View of the foreign factories at Canton, about 1805, reverse glass painting, 50.2 × 70.9 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Gift of the Misses Aimée and Rosamond Lamb in memory and in honor of Thomas Lamb, 1967, E78680.

Views of Guangzhou

Cantonese trade paintings of Indian nobility are rare. Not surprisingly, the subject most frequently tackled by painters in Guangzhou was of Canton (Guangzhou) itself. In 1784, American merchants from the "flowery flag nation" participated for the first time in the highly regulated system of trade that had been established in Guangzhou nearly thirty years prior. Like the European rivals who had preceded them, Americans saw little of China beyond the narrow stretch of land along the Pearl River where they lived and worked. In 1786, American merchant Samuel Shaw (1754–1794) noted that:

> the factories at Canton, occupying less than a quarter of a mile in front, are situated on the bank of the River … the limits of the Europeans are extremely confined, there being besides the Key, only a few streets in the Suburbs, occupied by the trading people, which they are allowed to frequent. Europeans, after a dozen years' resident, have not seen more than what the first month presented to view.[12]

A view of this familiar sight was precisely what many American mariners sought as souvenirs of their time in China. Cantonese artists catered to every price point, producing expensive versions in oil on canvas and reverse glass painting as well as more affordable examples in watercolor on imported English paper or Chinese pith paper—the latter being the early nineteenth-century equivalent of a postcard. One example (fig. 5), in reverse painting on glass, descended in the family of Boston merchant Thomas

6 Fatqua, active late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century, Guangzhou, *Hebe Serving Wine to the Gods*, 1810–1825, after a European engraving, reverse glass painting, 63.5 × 49.5 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Museum purchase, made possible by an anonymous donor, and gift of Richard Milhender, 2000, AE85712.

Lamb (1753–1813) and survives in its original Cantonese-trade carved and gilded frame. The arrangement of the flags and the architectural developments of the Western-style facades indicate that this view was likely painted around 1805.[13] The artist who executed this view of the foreign factories likely maintained a studio nearby. While we know a great deal about the foreign merchants and consumers who commissioned and enjoyed reverse glass paintings produced in Guangzhou, we know little about the artists themselves and their studio practices.

Guangzhou Studios of Reverse Glass Painting

From European and American archival sources we know the names of several practitioners working in reverse glass painting. Spoilum, Pungqua (or Pu Qua), and Cinqua, for example, are all mentioned, but even these are the Westernized names they were known by in the trade, rather than their proper Chinese names.[14] Thus far, we have identified only one artist working in reverse glass who signed his work within the glass: Fatqua. Below the elaborate red, black, and gilded border surrounding his exquisite image of Hebe, handmaiden to the Gods, runs a Latin inscription in gold "Fatqua Canton Pinxt" (fig. 6). At least one other reverse painting with this elaborate border and inscription survives.[15]

Fatqua signed his work in multiple ways and, from these imprints, we can glean a bit more about the artist and his studio. An engraved maker's label that survives on sev-

7 A pair of Chinese reverse glass paintings of *A Visit to the Grandmother* and *A Visit to the Grandfather* on display in Peabody Essex Museum's Gardner–Pingree House, built in 1804.

eral works from the studio depicts a large easel with paint pots and a paint box in the foreground. An inscription on the easel reads "*Fatqua, PAINTER in Oil and Water Colours, and on Glass, China Street, Canton. Prepares boxes of assorted colours for draw. at the lowest terms*."[16] From his shop on New China Street, just around the corner from the foreign factories, Fatqua apparently sold not only finished works in oil, watercolor, and reverse glass, but also souvenir boxes of paints for foreigners (or their families back home) to produce their own images.[17] Like many of his competitors, Fatqua almost certainly had a group of artists working with and for him. One painting from a set of watercolors of local landmarks near Guangzhou bears a red woodblock-stamped "FATQUA" on the verso. These watercolors, all on imported J. Whatman paper watermarked for 1824, are likely part of the more mass-produced works generated by Fatqua's studio.[18]

Reverse Glass Paintings with American Provenances and Themes

A pair of reverse paintings with an exceptionally well-documented early nineteenth-century history in Salem are now part of the period-appropriate furnishings for the Gardner–Pingree house, one of PEM's fourteen historic houses. Depicting the sentimental images of "A Visit to the Grandmother" and "A Visit to the Grandfather," they now hang over the fireplace in the guest bed chamber (fig. 7). When Salem ship captain George Hodges (1765–1827) departed from Guangzhou in November 1802 on the

8 Artists in Guangzhou, China. *America,* after 1781, after a print by Joseph Strutt, 1781, after a painting by Robert Edge Pine, 1778, reverse glass painting, 59.7× 75.2 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Museum purchase, made possible by an anonymous donor, 2001, AE85958.

Union, he brought back for himself lacquerware, porcelain, knife cases, fireworks, and a pair of pictures entitled "A visit to Grandfather and Grandmother."[19] Clifford Crowninshield (1762–1809), also of Salem and one of the four owners of the vessel, imported a duplicate pair of these pictures on the *Union*.[20] Both works are based on English mezzotints printed between 1785 and 1799 by William Ward (1766–1826) after paintings by John Raphael Smith (1751–1812) and James Northcote (1746–1831).[21] When these paintings were imported to the United States in 1802, they were unquestionably destined for an elegant Salem interior, even if we cannot currently identify whether PEM's pair originally belonged to Crowninshield or Hodges.

Many of the reverse glass paintings Americans purchased in Guangzhou could have been intended for multiple markets, but some were specially commissioned to appeal to uniquely American audiences (fig. 8). Just days before General Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown in 1781, Robert Edge Pine (1730–1788) printed an engraving of the personification of America kneeling before a funerary obelisk. The names of Revolutionary War heroes who had fought and died for American independence—Warren, Montgomery, Wooster, and Mercer—are engraved on the obelisk; America is surrounded by personifications of Peace, Virtue, Liberty, Concord, Industry, and Plenty. A burning city in ruins in the dark background to the left contrasts with a fleet of ships

9 Artists in Guangzhou, China. *A Portrait of His Excellency George Washington, Supported by Emblematic Figures,* after 1795, after an engraving published by John Jones, 1795, reverse glass painting, 87.3 × 67.9 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Museum purchase, made possible by an anonymous donor, 2002, AE86361.

in the sunny distance to the right. As Americans concluded the war and embarked on direct trade with China in 1784, this image of grief and hope for the future of the new nation would have been a particularly apt image for Americans to commission from artists in Guangzhou.

George Washington

In 1795, Dublin printer John Jones (fl. 1786–1828) sent George Washington (1732–1799) the first five volumes of his *Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* along with a letter indicating his desire to dedicate the sixth volume to "his Excellency" and include a portrait of the President "executed by an Irish artist in an elegant manner."[22] The engraving Jones included in the frontispiece of volume 6 features the kneeling figure of Columbia holding an oval portrait of Washington loosely based on a portrait by Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828), surrounded by the figures of Justice (blindfolded and holding scales) and Liberty (with her cap and rod).[23] Befitting the magazine in which it was published, masonic imagery is incorporated throughout the composition. The print served as the source for the Cantonese painter who executed the reverse glass in fig. 9. An inscription at the base of the reverse painting is taken from a poem by M. E.

10 Artists in Guangzhou, China. *The Apotheosis of Washington*, after 1802, after a print by John James Barralet, 1802, reverse glass painting, 70.8 × 51.7 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Museum purchase, made possible by an anonymous donor, 1978, E81885.

11 Artists in Guangzhou, China. Portrait of George Washington, 1800–1815, after a painting by Gilbert Stuart, reverse glass painting, 82.5 × 64.8 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Gift of Mr. Howell N. White, Jr., 1970, E78992.

O'Brien dedicated "to his Excellency George Washington" and published in the same volume: "When FREEDOM first her glorious DAY had won / She smil'd on WASHINGTON her darling Son / Mild JUSTICE claims him as his Virtues wise / And LOVE and HONOR still attend the Prize."[24] While the print was executed within Washington's lifetime, the reverse glass painting may have been commissioned after his death.

Celebrated in life, Washington was virtually deified after his death through images like American artist John James Barralet's (1747–1815) *Apotheosis of Washington*.[25] Barralet's stipple engraving, published in January 1802 in Philadelphia by Simon Chaudron, was among the earliest works of art acquired by the East India Marine Society, PEM's foundational collection.[26] It hung in the society's rooms, not far from where members offered a toast in 1808 to "The Memory of Washington; may his Virtues and Patriotism be followed as well as admired by every American."[27]

In 1805, Edward Carrington (1775–1843) of Rhode Island commissioned six paintings of the *Apotheosis of Washington* and ten portraits of the first president from artists in Guangzhou.[28] At least four Chinese reverse glass paintings based on Barralet's *Apotheosis* print survive, including the PEM example, which is in its original Chinese gilded frame and marked with a label: "Bought of Frederick C. Garbanati, gilder and Picture Frame Maker, 215 Westminster St., Providence, R.I." (fig. 10). Another copy, now in the Marblehead His-

torical Society's collection descended with a history that it was painted in China about 1813 for Benjamin Wheeler of Boston.[29]

The most ubiquitous example of early nineteenth century "Washingtoniana" is also one of the most intriguing stories of early American entrepreneurship in the arts (fig. 11). When John E. Sword (1765–1810), Captain of the ship *Connecticut* headed out on his second voyage to China in 1801, he brought with him an oil painting of George Washington he had purchased from Gilbert Stuart. In Guangzhou, Sword commissioned 100 portraits of Washington in oil on canvas and reverse glass to resell upon his return to the United States. The following year, when Stuart learned of Sword's sale of these Cantonese versions of his Washington portrait, he sued Sword in the Eastern District Court of Pennsylvania for copyright infringement. When delivering his verdict, William Tilghman (1756–1827), Chief Judge of the Circuit Court at Philadelphia, ordered Sword to "desist from selling or otherwise disposing of the same copies of the Portraits aforesaid."[30] Sword likely had not intended to sell the portraits as counterfeit Stuart paintings given that at least some of the 100 paintings were in reverse glass, a medium which the American purchasers would likely have known were Chinese. But even the "original" Stuart painting was in fact also a copy—one of over sixty replicas Stuart painted after his Athenaeum portrait—which Stuart sold for $100 apiece. What constitutes an original and a copy within Cantonese trade painting is rarely as straightforward as it may seem.[31]

Conclusion

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Americans' burgeoning pride in their independence from Great Britain coincided with a period of exuberance in the production and exportation of Cantonese reverse glass painting. Two of the Chinese works with early American provenances discussed here—the reverse glass portraits of George Washington and the Governor of Surat—were based respectively on an American oil painting and an Indian miniature painting. But the majority of Cantonese reverse glass paintings produced during this period and destined for American households were based directly on imported prints. While these reverse glass paintings often celebrated the nation's newly-won independence, many of these images were ironically based on prints produced in England and later brought to China, a reflection of the complex artistic exchanges at play in these remarkable works of cultural hybridity.

1 Richards 1994, 9–10.
2 EIMS 1821. Schwartz 2020.
3 Kennedy 2020, 68.
4 New research by George Schwartz reattributes the provenance of this work, which has previously been published as a gift from Captain Solomon Towne. Schwartz 2021; EIMS 1825.
5 I thank Siddhartha V. Shah and Michelguglielmo Torri for confirmation of the inscription and assistance with identification of the sitter.

6 Mather Brown gave his own copy of this print to the Royal Academy in 1830. Royal Academy Collection Database 03/4653.
7 Crossman 1991, 216.
8 Bean 2001, 82–83.
9 This reverse glass, acquired for PEM in London, was not made specifically for the American market. I thank Monica Anke Hahn for identifying the Renaults and for drawing my attention to an example of the corresponding print surviving in India. Museums of India Collection Database, C1003. For more on this reverse painting on glass, see Hahn's forthcoming book *Harlequins of Empire: Staging Native Identity in British Imperial Art c. 1776*.
10 Archer 1972.
11 Eaton 2004.
12 Shaw 1786, 383.
13 For an illustration of a reverse glass painted example from the 1780s and a comprehensive discussion of this topic, see Conner 2009, 49.
14 Crossman 1991, 207.
15 The other signed reverse painting depicts the Holy Family on their flight into Egypt, after an engraving by Raphael. Howard 1978, 652.
16 For a brocaded silk album cover with this label, which no longer contains any paintings, see Peabody Essex Museum Accession Record AE85554. Another label on the verso of a reverse painting of *The Lady and the Snake* is illustrated in Howard 1978, 645.
17 For an illustration of one of these commercially produced Cantonese paint boxes, see Historic Deerfield Collection Database, HD 2014.20.1.
18 For these watercolors by Fatqua's studio, see Peabody Essex Museum accession records, E85111–E85113.
19 I thank Jessica Lanier for drawing my attention to this and related archival references. Hodges 1802.
20 Hodges 1803.
21 Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco Collection Database, 1927.293 and 1927.253
22 Jones 1795. Fred W. Smith National Library Database, AP4.S45. Jones's letter to George Washington and Washington's copies of these volumes are now preserved at Mount Vernon, see George Washington's Mount Vernon Website.
23 For a reproduction of the engraving, see Freemasons, 1902, opposite 173.
24 O'Brien 1795, 548.
25 Jacobs 1977.
26 EIMS 1821, Peabody Essex Museum Accession Records, 106774 (EIMS#235).
27 Schwartz 2020, 31.
28 Carringon 1804–1806, cited in Crossman 1991, 215.
29 Merrow 1980.
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31 Wong 2010, 90–100. Cao 2019.

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7

REGARDING THE TRANSFER OF VERNACULAR MOTIFS AND OTHER COMMON FEATURES OF CHINESE NEW YEAR PRINTS AND CHINESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTING

Alina Martimyanova

Abstract

By taking the motifs of vernacular imagery, compositional devices, and use of color combinations as reference points, this analysis will argue for a domestic interaction in the processes of production and consumption of reverse glass painting and popular prints in China. Common target markets, mobility of craftsmen, and a shared aesthetic vocabulary played an important role in transfer between the two media.

Keywords

Reverse glass painting, vernacular art, popular prints, *nianhua,* motif transfer

Introduction

This study began from the observations of many parallels in the subject matter of Chinese reverse glass painting and Chinese popular prints produced for the local population from the nineteenth century until well into the twentieth century. Scenes from vernacular novels and folk legends, deities of Chinese pantheon, auspicious motifs and symbols, and, in general, a great many shared motifs can be observed in these art forms. This essay will attempt a comparative overview of the cross-media exchange between Chinese reverse glass painting and popular prints and suggest some arguments to explain this phenomenon.

First, we need to start with defining the objects of our study. The term "Chinese popular prints" generally refers to woodblock printed images, sometimes called New Year prints (*nianhua* 年畫)[1] produced for the urban and peasant population, imbued with folk aesthetics and rooted deeply in popular customs. Such imagery was produced in the form of inexpensive and colorful single sheet prints for mass consumption. They embodied people's wishes for the well-being of the family, luck in all undertakings, and protection for their households. Illustrations of popular narratives and theatrical plays

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served as examples of proper conduct and sources of entertainment. These prints, while collected eagerly in Japan and in Western countries from the eighteenth century until today, were originally produced for the use by Chinese consumers.[2]

While the origins of Chinese popular prints can be traced back as far as the tenth century, reverse glass painting is a comparatively new phenomenon in Chinese art. It can be defined as a painting executed in oil on the reverse of a flat glass panel or a mirror and viewed from the unpainted side. The practice is said to have appeared in southern China during the late Ming 明 (1368–1644) and early Qing 清 (1644–1912) dynasties.[3] Reverse glass paintings were produced both for export to the Western markets and for local market in China, so the subjects represented in them varied, depending on the market it was made for and/or their commissioners. By taking the motifs of Chinese popular imagery as reference points, this analysis will argue for the existence of a domestic interaction between the painted images on glass and printed images on paper, linked to common cultural background and modes of production and consumption.

The visual material from the extensive Mei Lin collection of Chinese reverse glass painting builds the basis of this investigation.[4] These paintings were all produced between 1890 and 1935. It is exactly this period that presents us with the subject matter so close to other vernacular art forms in China, as it is the time when reverse glass painting became widespread throughout China and entered its "vernacular phase." The time frame of the production of popular prints in this overview roughly corresponds with the time of production of the reverse glass paintings analyzed.

Unfortunately, reverse glass painting and popular prints suffer from the lack of primary documentation about the production practices, workshops, and artists. Only a few records from the Western sojourners in China and from collectors are extant. In the majority of cases, artists remain anonymous, with only a handful of identified names. A visual comparison and an analysis of social, cultural, and economic factors related to the subject will help us with the investigation of the questions raised at the beginning of this essay.

Comparative Overview of Vernacular Motifs in the Two Media

Among the shared pool of motifs between the popular prints and reverse glass paintings we may define several distinct categories. The first category features auspicious motifs, denoting wishes for male progeny, good luck, wealth and prosperity, marital bliss or passing imperial examinations. For example, depictions of a plump happy boy holding a citrus fruit known in China as Buddha's hands (*foshou* 佛手) are frequently encountered both as New Year prints (fig. 1) as well as on reverse painting on glass (fig. 2). The fruit's name is homophonous with the words *fu* 福 and *shou* 壽, meaning "happiness" and "longevity." Common to both media represented in these two examples are characteristic pigtails and the shoes with an embroidered character *wang* 王, referring to the tiger.

1 *Boy with the Fruit Buddha's Hands*, late nineteenth–early twentieth century, woodblock print, ink and colors on paper, 34 × 54 cm, The State Hermitage museum, St. Petersburg, LT-2287.

2 *Boys with Buddha's Hands Citrons* (one of a pair), 1890–1935, reverse glass painting, 18.9 × 12.3 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

Another pair of comparative examples are two images that represent phoenix birds among peonies. While each of them exhibits a very distinctive color palette, the similarity in composition is striking. The remarkably large format print was made with imported aniline pigments and finished by hand (fig. 3). Such images were produced in southern China from the sixteenth century onward as luxurious editions destined to be wedding gifts. In contrast, the phoenix painting on glass features *verre eglomisé* technique with unpainted areas filled with silver leaf and the phoenix and peonies details kept in warm reddish-yellow hues (fig. 4). In general, phoenix imagery is associated with a hope to attract glory and honors, while the peony symbolizes nobility and riches. The two are also thought to represent masculine and female elements, thus expressing the idea of a family union and were fit to be hung up in a bedroom of a newlywed couple.[5] Peony flowers in popular prints and in popular reverse glass paintings were frequently depicted in other constellations, for example, with roosters on rocks.[6] As a symbol of wealth and good luck, a rooster (*ji* 雞 in Chinese, which is homophonous with *ji* 吉 for "lucky, auspicious") placed on a rock stands for the formulaic

3 *Auspicious Phoenix*, around 1926, woodblock print, ink and colors on paper, 110 × 62.5 cm, Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of Hilde Flory-Fischer.

4 *Phoenixes between Peonies* (one of a pair), 1890–1935, reverse glass painting, 21.8 × 15.5 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

visual expression of a wish to receive profits from a first day in business. Such prints were hung up in the shops and we do know that after reverse glass painting became widely popular among different levels of Chinese society they were given as presents on occasion of a shop opening.

Wishes to have male progeny in the family expressed through popular woodblock prints and reverse glass painting build another prominent group within the category of auspicious subjects shared by the two media. They are represented, for example, by the popular "Qilin bringing sons" composition with a legendary animal *qilin* 麒麟[7] carrying a son or several sons on his back.[8] Depictions of mothers with little boys also relate to the theme of male progeny and do so again through homophony. For example, a boy may be holding a pomegranate fruit with many seeds inside. The Chinese word for "seed" (*zi* 子) is homophonous with "sons," thus creating a symbolic connection to the hope for many boys in the family.[9]

Depictions of various deities form a small, but prominent group of subjects shared between vernacular painting on glass and vernacular prints in China. This subject matter is one of the most prevalent in the popular prints. In the reverse glass paintings

5 *Guanyin as a Bringer of Children* (*Songzi Guanyin* 送子觀音), 1890–1935, reverse glass painting, 48.3 × 33.8 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

6 *Bodhisattva Guanyin as Bestower of Sons* (*Songzi Guanyin* 送子觀音), late nineteenth-early twentieth century, woodblock print, ink and colors on paper, 89.4 × 49.3 cm. From the collection of Christer von der Burg.

produced in vernacular style, it is observed much less frequently. Let us have a closer look at the depictions of the Buddhist deity Guanyin觀音, the bodhisattva of compassion, as an example. In both images, on glass (fig. 5) and in print (fig. 6), she is depicted in her residence on Mount Putuo 普陀山, identifiable by the stylized waters and rocks on which her lotus throne is placed. We can also see a vase with a willow branch and her acolytes Longnü 龍女and Shancai 善才. In both examples, the Guanyin is holding a baby boy in her hands. Deities from Taoist pantheon are also frequently featured in vernacular imagery in both media, with such groups as the Eight Immortals (*Baxian* 八仙) and the Three Stars (*Sanxing* 三星), deities of Wealth, Happiness, and Longevity enjoying the most attention by the artists in the two media.

Another popular subject is the fairy Magu 麻姑. Magu is often depicted alone or in a company of her acolyte and a deer. She is usually carrying *lingzhi* 靈芝mushrooms or a fragrant wine of longevity. Characteristic to her depictions are flowing robes, flowery headdress, and lively body positions, emphasizing her emanation as a young woman. These iconographic elements of the deity are consistently repeated regardless of the medium. There are also examples that put her in a setting based on one of the legends

7 *The Fairy Magu Brings Her Wine* (*Magu xian shou* 麻姑獻壽), 1890–1935, reverse glass painting, 39.3 × 59.2 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

8 *Fairy Magu Gives a Peach*, late nineteenth–early twentieth century, woodblock print, ink and colors on paper, 59 × 35 cm, The State Hermitage museum, St. Petersburg, LT-4813. Photograph.

about her. She is depicted together with the gods of Wealth, Happiness, and Longevity. The images on glass and in print exhibit some differences: while the reverse glass painting (fig. 7) shows Magu presenting a tripod vessel filled with wine of longevity to Shouxing 壽星, in the woodblock print (fig. 8) she is presenting a tray of *lingzhi* mushrooms to the Fuxing 福星and Luxing 陸星. According to the notes of Vasily Alekseyev, who collected these prints in China, Shouxing is in the image as well, symbolized by the peaches of immortality.[10] The elixir we see in the glass painting is brewed nearby.

This example with Magu and the Three Stars falls into two categories simultaneously: it represents a deity from the pantheon of the popular religion and is also an illustration of a folk narrative. The category of narrative imagery based on legends, theatrical plays

9 *The Betrothal in the Eastern Wu Kingdom (The Husband Enters the Wife's Family),* late nineteenth–early twentieth century, woodblock print, ink and colors on paper, 63 × 110 cm, The State Hermitage museum, St. Petersburg, LT-6615. Photograph.

10 *Dragon and Phoenix Become a Couple* (*Long feng pei* 龍鳳配), 1890, reverse glass painting, 38.4 × 58.8 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

or literary texts is very popular within vernacular prints and vernacular reverse glass paintings.

For example, a great number of episodes from "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms" (*Sanguozhi yanyi* 三國志演義) and theatrical episodes based on the novel are illustrated in Chinese prints. This narrative was equally popular with artists painting on glass and their clients.[11] One of the most frequently represented episodes, called "Dragon and Phoenix Become a Couple," will serve as an illustration here (figs. 9–10). It shows the betrothal of Liu Bei 劉備, a descendant of the Han dynasty founder Liu Bang 劉邦, and Sun Shangxiang 孫尚香, the sister of the ruler of the Wu 吳 Kingdom. In this scene Liu Bei is preparing to enter the chambers of his bride. The composition is divided into two parts: interior, with the bride and her attendants, framed by the doorway, and exte-

rior, with Liu Bang and attendants on the outside. In fact, this composition is extremely popular in Chinese folk art and is repeated over and over in various media.
The eighteenth-century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber (Honglou meng* 紅樓夢) written in vernacular language has inspired a wide range of popular imagery featuring famous episodes, and so did numerous theatrical adaptations of this literary work.[12] Many famous episodes with characters loved by the public were illustrated in the two media. The "Legend of the White Snake" (*Bashe zhuan* 白蛇傳) and its theatrical adaptations inspired renditions of different episodes both in print and in glass painting. From the rich in detail "In the Mountain of Longevity to Steal the Herb of Life" to the romantic "Xu Xuan Rows on the Lake" and on to the extremely charged scene in "Green Snakes Attacks Xu Xuan," all of these episodes, regardless of the medium, show recognizable setups in the composition, recurring details, and often theatrically exaggerated gestures.
Finally, one genre was extremely widespread in the examples of Chinese reverse glass painting for local and export markets alike, but also within the medium of popular prints in China. The depictions of beautiful women, seated at a table and surrounded by fashionable accessories or auspicious objects stand for an ideal type of a beauty, a collective idea of a woman that evokes a number of emotions: from erotic longing to the appreciation of a female character in the times of change.[13]

Transfer and Interaction between the Two Media

An important reason for the growing popularity of reverse glass painting among the Chinese middle-class consumers in the late imperial period was the localization of glass production and the reduction of the glass cost, making it widely available.[14] Dutch trading documents from 1608 testify that European sheet glass and mirrors were exported to China already in the seventeenth century, even though there is no record of Chinese reverse glass paintings until the first half of the eighteenth century and later.[15] Yang Boda mentions reverse glass painting as decoration of the items sent to the emperors Kangxi 康熙 (r.1661–1722) and Yongzheng 雍正 (r.1722–1735) emperors in 1722 and 1731, so there is at least this *terminus ad quem* with regard to the use of this technique by Chinese artisans in the south of China.[16] Glass import to China continued, but local production of glass was gradually established as well. In 1699, the French traders from the Compagnie de la Chine[17] established a glass factory in Guangzhou for which they got permission from the emperor.[18] Two glass artisans from France, named in the records D'Andigné and Vilette, also arrived to China with the French and stayed in Beijing for several years working in the glass workshop that was set up in the Forbidden City.[19] Painted glass and mirrors were abundant in imperial households and inevitably caused the fashion for glass windows and reverse glass painting among the Qing elite and in the homes of wealthy Canton merchants, who, in imitation of the court, decorated their homes with luxurious items with Western flavor.[20]

During the Qianlong 乾隆 (r.1735–1796) and Jiaqing 嘉慶 (r.1796–1820) reign periods, with the "court taste trickling to the lower classes and across the empire,"[21] reverse glass painting became popular in the present-day provinces of Zhejiang 浙江, Jiangsu 江蘇, Hebei 河北, Shanxi 山西, Heilongjiang 黑龍江, and others, and was used as presents for opening businesses, wedding gifts, and home decoration well into the late Qing and Republican periods. The popularity of reverse glass painting with the rich and powerful enhanced its attractiveness for the middle- and lower-class consumers. Glass as a material was also thought to be more durable and thus it partially replaced prints as decoration and window paper in domestic usage by the households that could afford it.[22] This Western import, now produced domestically, with a fairly new and fashionable painting technique was translated into a consumer demand by different parts of the society, from the emperor to the populace.

The variety of motifs in reverse glass painting (Chinese, Western, and hybrid motifs) is a result of its varied markets. Another way to categorize these motifs would be to use the categories of style: court, export, and vernacular. The remaining key question is how vernacular motifs were transferred onto the medium of reverse glass painting and appropriated by it. The mobility of artisans in late imperial China might have played an important role here.

Knowledge of skillful artists and artisans circulated widely so that the best practitioners in reverse glass painting would often be sent from Canton to the court in Beijing to join the palace workshops dedicated to reverse glass painting.[23] They would remain there for a while before returning to their original place of work or moving to another city and catering to new consumers. Spending time in the palace workshops not only added prestige to the name of an artisan, but also provided the opportunity to learn new artistic styles, namely of the court painting and of Western painting manner. Talented designers of popular prints were also occasionally invited to palace workshops to work on commissions and, upon their return home, infused the production of vernacular prints in such places as Yangliuqing 楊柳青 with a more refined court style. We do not know whether glass painters and print designers crossed paths in palace workshops, although it is not unlikely, since court artisans resided in common quarters. A Ying, for example, suggested that some of the Yangliqing *nianhua* repertoire and style was influenced by glass painting and painting on porcelain, using "The Dream of the Red Chamber" imagery as an example.[24] He maintains that the *nianhua* artist Gao Tongxuan 高桐軒(1835–1906) has seen glass painting in the imperial painting workshops in Beijing and adopted its stylistic features into his work in Yangliuqing.

It remains open how wide-spread the cross-media artistic mobility was during this time period, i.e., whether it was common for professional artists trained in one media to take up the practice in another media in the course of their career. Cases of mobility among artisans were rarely recorded, but we do have testimonies about print designers who have taken up painting and, vice versa, of artists like Qian Hui'an 錢慧安 (1833–1911) that were active for some time as print designers.[25] It does not seem unlikely that some elements from motif repertoires and expressive techniques circulated in broader cir-

cles of artisans, thus ensuring a basic paradigm of artistic practice and a common pool of images that could be executed and recognized by everyone involved.

It can be suggested that the circulation of vernacular motifs between different media was facilitated by the so-called sketches, or *huagao* 畫稿 and *huayang* 畫樣, pictorial samples, sometimes collected in make-shift anthologies for artisans called *huaben* 畫本.[26] These terms stem from the print industry but are used in many genres of vernacular arts. Before creating an image, folk artists would produce a rough drawing, *huagao*. After repeated improvements the final *huagao* would be reproduced onto the ready-to-carve design. A successful *huagao* would be preserved for copying and learning by others. *Huayang* were samples representing various types of pictorial elements used as models by many generations in the workshop, such as "types of miscellaneous bamboo," "types of houses," "types of foreign barbarians, savages and beasts," "types of miscellaneous supernatural beings," and so on. This explains why we sometimes encounter similar pictorial elements, for example poses of specific characters, used repeatedly in images from different periods.[27]

The markets of middle- and lower-class consumers that these two media shared set certain requirements for the successful sales of the artwork: it should be exciting, attractive, and preferably auspicious. Wang Shucun in his study of the aesthetics of Chinese vernacular art summarized these requirements in the following way: the image must have a dramatic plot, so that even after numerous viewings it will not be boring; the expression must be auspicious, only then can it answer people's expectations; and the characters must be attractive, then they will be liked by the public. [28] Aesthetic standards of folk art required an image to show characters in their most attractive form, "pretty and bright."[29] The notions of festivity and theatricality may serve as keys explaining the vibrant colors in vernacular images. They also evoked the feelings of enjoyment experienced during theatrical performances that were central to village und urban life and "to the conceptual and imaginative worlds of ordinary people."[30] Another "unspoken" prerequisite to produce vernacular art was an instant accessibility of the subjects and themes, including those represented in prints and reverse glass painting. One look at a painting or a print should be enough for a viewer to identify the subject: for example, the theatrical episode or an auspicious message expressed by the image. The requirement of a shared aesthetic paradigm and a common vocabulary of subject matter explains a lot of the similarities we find between Chinese popular woodblock prints and Chinese reverse glass painting created for the domestic market in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Further Perspectives in the Research on Transmedial Connections

The commonalities we observe between the two art forms suggest several points of connection: first and foremost, in the transfer of motifs through their shared target markets and mobility of craftsmen, but also in the shared aesthetic paradigm. There is more research to be done here, in particular with regard to the specific regional styles.

While this direction of study might be impeded by the lack of documentation, looking into the correlation of the glass production centers and regional clusters of print workshops might yield interesting results.

There is another aspect that was not touched upon in this essay: How do we look at Western motifs that appear in wider China, or at Chinese motifs that take on Western forms and styles, while retaining vernacular narratives and characters? Craig Clunas once proposed to speak of the Westernizing mode in Chinese *occidenterie* and this notion might help us explain the hybrid nature of the reverse glass painting with Chinese motifs and their sometimes not quite "Chinese" look.[31] Maybe it is also possible to think of these paintings in terms of a very extended and indirect artistic engagement with the West that connected not only to the imperial court in Beijing or export painting workshops in Canton, but further, to the present-day provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Hebei, Shanxi, and Heilongjiang, where such reverse glass paintings were produced and enjoyed.

1 Due to the popularity of the term New Year prints (*nianhua*) in both Chinese and Western discourse, it may create a false impression that all these images were only produced and used around New Year's festivities. In this paper the term *nianhua* and a broader term "popular [woodblock] prints" (*minjian [mu] banhua* 民間木版年畫) will be used interchangeably.

2 For a more detailed overview of the history of collecting Chinese prints see Lust 1996, 14–22 and Xu 2011.

3 A frequent assumption that the technique was introduced at the court by the Jesuit missionaries is disproved by such documents as the letters of Brother Attiret relating his experience with painting in the technique new to them as well as the notes on the reverse painting on glass by Chinese artisans at court, see Audric 2020, 26–27. It is important, however, to acknowledge the plentiful records from the Jesuit missionaries about reverse glass painting in China as well as a corpus of works on glass they were commissioned to do for the emperor.

4 My profound gratitude goes to Rupprecht Mayer and Haitang Mayer-Liem for their encouraging of my research and permission to use images from their collection.

5 See, for example, Eberhard 1986, 228, elaborating on the symbolism of the combination of phoenix and peony.

6 Unfortunately, due to the limitations on the number of images, we can only refer to the examples published elsewhere in some cases. Several outstanding examples of this type are published in Mayer 2018, cat. 14, 15, 16. For the comparative example in the medium as a print, see Rudova 1988, cat. 73.

7 It is a magical animal with a tail of an ox, the body of a deer, the scales of a dragon, and a five-colored mane.

8 Examples of this subject in the *nianhua* show a lot of regional varieties in style, while maintaining the same key compositional elements. See, for instance, Laing 2010, 151. A corresponding image as reverse painting on glass can be found in Mayer 2018, cat. 123.

9 See, for example, a glass painting published in Mayer 2018, cat. 26. A similar print can be found, for example, at the State Museum of the History of Religion in St. Petersburg, Russia (accession no. Д-3565-VII).

10 Quoted from the "Explanatory Notes on Rough Pictures, No. 110" by Alekseyev in Rudova 1988, Cat. 68.

11 The popularity of *Sanguozhi* narratives goes far beyond China. Jessica Lee Patterson has published an investigation on Chinese reverse glass painting in Bangkok Monasteries, among which the motifs from the "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" take a very prominent place, see Patterson 2016.

12 For example, the episode called “Lin Daiyu plays the zither” in a corresponding pair in Mayer 2018, cat. 115 (glass) and an image from the collection State Museum of the History of Religion, St. Petersburg (print, acc.no. Д-3637-VII). The inscription on the glass painting gives us the date and the artist’s name: *xinwei* 辛未year (1930) and Li Yunting 李雲亭. The print from the Dailianzeng 戴廉增 workshop in Yangliuqing 楊柳青 is from an earlier date at the turn of the century.

13 The German Mei-Lin Collection contains a whole range of such representations. Some of the images were published in Mayer 2018. Painted in the late nineteenth century, cat. 48, for example, features a woman sitting by a table with a foreign-made clock. Many of the prints produced in the nineteenth and twentieth century also show beauties in resplendent garments seated at a table, often with a vase of plum blossoms and bamboo.

14 A broader account on the use of glass in the day-to-day life of Chinese society can be found in Cao 2012.

15 After Mayer 2018, 12.

16 Yang 1987, 41.

17 Originally established in 1660, it was a French trading company modelled after the Dutch East India Company.

18 Curtis 2009, 44.

19 Lihong Liu provides an extensive and very helpful account of glass as a material in Chinese and global perspective in Liu 2016, 19–23.

20 Curtis 2009, 48.

21 So aptly expressed by Kristina Kleutghen in Kleutghen 2014, 125.

22 I am grateful for the comments by Lihong Liu about the interchangeability of glass and paper as a material during the workshop in Romont on February 14–15, 2020, as well as after our “Global Interchange” online seminar, on June 5, 2020.

23 Curtis 2009, 51.

24 A Ying 1982, 151. See also the discussion in Wang 2015, 22 on Gao Tongxuan.

25 Recorded, for example in Cai Shenwu’s *Beijing suishi ji* 北京歲時記 (“Records from the Northern Capital”) and quoted in Wang 2002, 277–279.

26 Tianjin University 2019.

27 Because painting on glass was done in reverse order, the artists were extensively using existing images and models for the sake of efficiency, see Cao 2019, 82.

28 In Chinese: 画中要有戲, 百看才不膩；出口要吉利, 才能合人意；人品要俊秀, 能得人歡喜. See Wang, 1956, 13. Translation by the author.

29 Ibid.

30 Johnson 2014, 46.

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8

THE NIGHTMARE
CASE STUDY OF A DELIBERATELY INACCURATE TRANSMISSION TO GLASS

Elisabeth Eibner

Abstract

This paper is a case study of the reverse glass painting *The Nightmare* after Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741–1825). By tracing the stages of transmission that Füssli's famous painting underwent it seeks to question the assumption that the reverse glass painting *The Nightmare* is an inferior copy of a Western painting. In doing so, this article argues that the unusual appearance of the reverse glass painting is due in part to the fact that it was copied from hand-colored engravings, and in part due to deliberate alterations undertaken by the artists involved in its making. It concludes that *The Nightmare* on glass is a deliberately altered copy of a Western engraving.

Keywords

Transmission, Copy, Johann Heinrich Füssli, Thomas Burke

Introduction

This paper is a case study of a reverse glass painting in the collection of Hélène and Thierry Audric, given the title *The Nightmare*, (fig. 1) by Thierry Audric. The painting was displayed in the exhibition *Reflets de Chine* at the Vitromusée Romont in February 2020. It is a copy of the eponymous 1781 painting by the Anglo-Swiss artist Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741–1825). In the 2020 exhibition, *The Nightmare* stood out from the other reverse glass paintings due to its striking appearance. Hung alongside near-perfect eighteenth-century painted copies of European prints on glass, *The Nightmare*, with its blue-green tones and almost cartoonish depiction of Füssli's horse and incubus, looked like an inferior copy incomparable with the eighteenth-century painting output of Canton.

This painting breaks with tradition in several ways. First, as a copy of a Western painting it is highly unfaithful to the original. Second, in its style it does not attempt a naturalistic depiction of the subject matter. Finally, the color-scheme stands out for its

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1 Anonymous, *The Nightmare*, ca. 1810, reverse glass painting, 29 × 33 cm, Collection of Hélène and Thierry Audric.

uniform use of a minimal color-palette. For these reasons, *The Nightmare* attracts attention, and its strange appearance raises the question: Is *The Nightmare* just a badly executed copy of a Western painting? And, further, what accounts for its unusual appearance? This essay will argue that *The Nightmare* is not an inferior copy, but rather a deliberate reimagining of a Western painting. This will be achieved by examining the stages of transmission that Füssli's painting underwent. The exploration of the possible engraved models for the reverse glass painting will establish that some incongruous features of the reverse glass painting—the cartoonish horse, the sharp outlines, and lack of depth—were in fact accurately copied from an engraving, while others—the color scheme and "incubus" figure—were deliberate alterations on the part of the Cantonese painter or painters.[1] Furthermore, this paper suggests that investigating reverse glass paintings such as *The Nightmare*, which do not comfortably fit the established canonical categories of art history, can shed light on hitherto unexplored aspects of the production and trade in reverse glass paintings in nineteenth-century China and the West.

Dating *The Nightmare*

Dating reverse glass paintings such as *The Nightmare* is a tricky endeavor, since the vast majority of Chinese reverse glass painters did not sign or date their work.

Pigments, frames, and subject matter can help with dating. However, while some non-invasive analysis methods are available, there has been no analysis yet of *The Nightmare*, so no data is available on which blue and green pigments were used.[2] The frame offers a more promising avenue of inquiry. The gilt frame of *The Nightmare* is a Chinese copy of a Louis XVI frame.[3] This and the subject matter are compatible with a late eighteenth- early nineteenth-century date for *The Nightmare*. However, although *The Nightmare*'s subject matter is copied from a Western engraving, one should be very wary of dating the painting too early, since *The Nightmare* does not follow the same pattern of transmission that other typical turn-of-the-century reverse glass paintings do.

Thierry Audric dates *The Nightmare* to between 1810 and 1850.[4] A later date than 1810 certainly is likely, as *The Nightmare* is a highly unusual copy of a Western painting and is visually incongruous with late eighteenth- and very early nineteenth-century reverse glass paintings. Furthermore, the horse in the reverse glass painting has added pupils and in 1827 a print of Füssli's *Nightmare* by William Raddon (flourished 1812–1862) was published in London featuring a horse with pupils. This suggests that in the late 1820s it became more common for Füssli's horse to be depicted with pupils.

Copying *The Nightmare*

Since the reverse glass painting *The Nightmare* is under consideration in this paper as a *copy* of Füssli's *The Nightmare*, it is pertinent to consider what the process of *copying* describes. The term *copy* should be understood here as an image that has taken the basic composition of another image as its model. Since the Western concept of a good copy is linked to the exactness of the reproduction, this has substantially affected Western perceptions of Chinese reverse glass painted copies such as *The Nightmare*. Therefore, the accuracy of *The Nightmare* as a reproduction of the original Füssli painting must be examined. This section will establish whether the reverse glass painting *The Nightmare* is indeed a bad copy, and if not, what accounts for the most obvious deviations from Füssli's original.

The Nightmare on glass looks striking. The cartoonish horse and the pensive incubus are incongruous in this bedroom scene. The drapery and the woman give a static impression, due to the sharp outlines and abrupt shading used throughout the painting. And yet the reverse glass painting is recognizably based on Füssli's *The Nightmare*. The basic composition of the painting, the placement and posture of the figures, and the content of the room, are identical to the original. When compared with the original (fig. 2), the strangeness of the reverse glass painting is thrown into even sharper relief. Four areas stand out as being of particular interest: the color scheme; the simplistic rendering of the horse; the incubus figure; and the sharp outlines. Since Cantonese painters would never have seen the original 1781 painting, it is essential to consult extant engravings of Füssli's *The Nightmare* in trying to establish what a Cantonese reverse glass painter had to work with.

2 Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741–1825), *The Nightmare*, 1781, oil on canvas, 101.7 × 127.1 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts.

3 Thomas Rowlandson, *The Covent Garden Night Mare*, 1784, hand-colored etching, 32.9 × 33.5 cm, British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.

4 Thomas Burke (1749–1815), *The Nightmare*, 1783, stipple engraving, ca. 22 × 25 cm, engraving after Johann Heinrich Füssli, British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Thomas Burke's *The Nightmare*

Füssli's *The Nightmare* must be among the most frequently printed and parodied paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (fig. 3). It is evident that Füssli's 1781 painting captured the imagination of the public, as engraved reproductions of the original as well as satirical takes on the *The Nightmare* abounded in Europe. The best-known print was the authorized version by Thomas Burke (1749–1812) (fig. 4) published in 1783, shortly after Füssli exhibited his work at the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1782. Füssli's close friend John Knowles said of *The Nightmare* and the Burke engraving:

> when placed in the annual exhibition of 1782, [it] excited, as it naturally would, an uncommon degree of interest. This picture was sold by him for twenty guineas; it was subsequently engraved by Burke, and published by J. R. Smith; and so popular was the subject, that the publisher acknowledged to have gained upwards of five hundred pounds by the sale of the prints, although vended at a small price.[5]

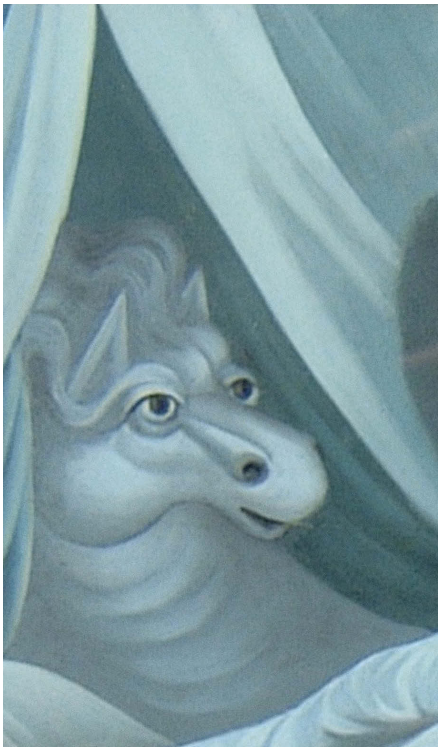
According to D. H. Weinglass, the price asked for a Burke engraving of *The Nightmare* was five shillings.[6] This implies the dissemination of at least two thousand individual prints. The Burke engraving is, thus, very likely to be the print that made its way across the globe to Canton to be copied. Nevertheless, a comparison of the reverse glass painting with Burke's 1783 engraving of Füssli's *The Nightmare* does little to illuminate the strange appearance of the reverse glass painting. If the Cantonese artist had only

5 Thomas Burke (1749–1815), *The Nightmare*, 1802, hand-colored stipple engraving, ca. 22 × 25 cm, engraving after Johann Heinrich Füssli, British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.

a black-and-white engraving to work with, it might explain the strange color scheme, as the artist or artists would have had to decide independently what colors were appropriate. A visual comparison with the reverse glass painting conclusively shows that only Laurede's (active late eighteenth century) 1782, or Burke's 1783 and 1802 engraved versions of *The Nightmare* could have been the models for the painting on glass, since both are stipple engravings and identical even down to the lines of poetry quoted beneath the prints.[7] Assuming that a monochrome version was used means that the choice of color in the reverse glass painting was deliberate, possibly made in recognition of the fact that it is a nighttime and an otherworldly scene. However, Burke's monochrome engraving does not explain the unusual rendering of the horse or the sharp outlines. Are they the result of inferior copying skills?

Color printing was uncommon in eighteenth-century Britain. However, prints were often sold hand-colored or were colored by their purchasers. There is one extant hand-colored Laurede print in the Kunsthaus Zürich (KHZ) and there are several extant hand-colored prints of Burke's engraving, which was reissued in 1802.[8] Of these, one is in a private collection, two are held by the KHZ, and one is in the British Museum (BM) (fig. 5).

6 Thomas Burke (1749–1815), *The Nightmare* (detail), 1802, hand-colored stipple engraving, ca. 22 × 25 cm, engraving after Johann Heinrich Füssli, British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.



7 Anonymous, *The Nightmare* (detail), ca. 1810, reverse glass painting, 29 × 33 cm, Collection of Hélène and Thierry Audric.

A Deliberately Altered Copy

If a comparison of Burke's monochrome engraving and the reverse glass painting yielded few revelations, a comparison with the BM hand-colored version explains several of the unusual features of the reverse glass painting. The process of coloring in the engraving created several drastic visual changes compared to the original. First, all outlines become very sharp, as opposed to the soft shading of the monochrome engraving. This is the case in both the BM version and the KHZ versions. This means elements of the composition that are almost indiscernible in the monochrome print are brought into sharp focus, such as the tassel in the top right corner and the table. These sharp outlines are reproduced in the reverse glass painting. Second, a comparison of the horse (figs. 6–7) explains its cartoonish appearance in the reverse glass painting. The hand-coloring process has endowed the horse with the rolls of fat around its neck, the pudgy cheek, pupils, and a quiff as opposed to a mane. The similarity of the horse figure and the sharp outlines strongly suggest that the artists in Canton worked with a hand-colored engraving.

Could the similarities between the BM hand-colored engraving and the reverse glass painting just be coincidence? The existence of the BM engraving is not conclusive

8 Thomas Burke (1749–1815), *The Night Mare*, 1802, hand-colored stipple engraving, 22.3 × 25 cm, engraving after Johann Heinrich Füssli. Kunsthaus Zürich, Graphische Sammlung.

evidence that a similar print made its way to Canton, since no two hand-colored prints are identical. Also, neither of the two hand-colored engravings in the KHZ feature horses with pupils (fig. 8). Is it going too far to assume that Cantonese painters had access to a hand-colored print that featured a horse with pupils? The 1827 Raddon print of Füssli's *The Nightmare* features a horse with pupils, so clearly the thought of adding pupils to Füssli's horse was not unheard of by the 1820s. Furthermore, the two hand-colored versions of Burke's engraving from 1802 in the KHZ both feature sharp outlines and a distinctly pudgy horse, so it is safe to assume that a hand-colored print was consulted in Canton.

The fact that a hand-colored engraving was used in the production of *The Nightmare* on glass has certain repercussions for previously held assumptions about the Cantonese reverse glass painting. The first assumption to fall under scrutiny is the idea that the reverse glass painting is an inferior copy of a Western painting. The existence of hand-colored engravings, such as the KHZ and BM versions (figs. 5–6), establishes that some of the main points of difference between the reverse glass painting and the original are not due to any lack of accurate copying skill on the part of the artists. Another assumption which must give way is that the colors were simply guessed at by

the artists. All extant hand-colored prints feature a multicolored palette and a color contrast between the curtain and the bedclothes. The existence of a model featuring the distinctly uniform blue and green tone of the reverse glass painting seems highly unlikely. The colors of the reverse glass painting must, therefore, be considered not only as a deliberate choice, but as a deliberate alteration made by the artist or artists. Thus, the reverse glass painting *The Nightmare* is not a bad copy of the original, but a *deliberately altered* copy of a hand-colored engraving.

Deliberate Alterations

It remains to be established why the Cantonese reverse glass painters chose to create a deliberately altered copy of a Western engraving. Since an unfaithful copy would probably not have been intended for export to the West, it is likely that some of the alterations were undertaken in order to make the painting more salable on the Chinese market. One puzzling alteration is the complete replacement of the incubus' face in the reverse glass painting. Instead of the frown and leathery complexion of Burke's and Laurede's incubus, the reverse glass painting's incubus has lidded blue eyes, smooth chubby cheeks, and a cherubic coral red mouth. As yet, no entirely satisfactory explanation of the incubus figure has been found, but it seems possible that the painters were attempting to depict a mythological or demonic character, and the alterations to the face underlined the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic nature of such beings. Thus, *The Nightmare*'s incubus may be illustrative of a complex series of transmission that involves the appropriation and alteration of Western images to create entirely new meanings.

Could the alteration of the color scheme to blues and greens have been a commercial consideration? This possibility is supported by the existence of a further reverse glass painting in Audric's collection, which was acquired at the same time and appropriately named *The Awakening* by him (fig. 9). The two paintings have the same dimensions, identical frames, and share some remarkable similarities in style and subject matter.[9] The painting features a Western woman reclining on a bed, surrounded by curtains painted with similar symmetry to those in *The Nightmare*. The head and torso of the woman look as though they may have been copied from a print.[10] The woman wears white and has a similar hair color and the same rolls of hair around the nape of the neck. In contrast to *The Nightmare,* one breast is exposed. This second reverse glass painting seems to have been made as a pair to *The Nightmare* and a continuation of the nighttime scene depicted there. The shift in color from pale turquoise to pale red and the change from sleeping to waking imply an almost narrative development. Both the verdigris of *The Nightmare* and the red of *The Awakening* are held in the same pastel-like tone, which heightens the effect of a pair illustrating the passage of time. *The Awakening* fits the description of an erotic and voyeuristic image of a Western woman, which *The Nightmare*, if it were not so firmly anchored in the Western art canon, would also fit. The two reverse glass paintings, especially *The Awakening*, are

9 Anonymous, *The Awakening*, ca. 1810, reverse glass painting, 29 × 33 cm, Collection of Hélène and Thierry Audric.

also reminiscent of paintings of reclining Chinese courtesans on glass. Thus, individually or as a pair, we can assume that the two reverse glass paintings were considered commercially viable images for local consumption, rather than as strict copies of Western prints intended for a high-end market. Thus, *The Awakening* opens an entirely new field of inquiry about the uses of Western prints in Canton, especially if it is a deliberately altered copy or is partially copied from a Western engraving.

The choice to alter the colors in *The Nightmare* to blue and green tones could also have been intended to underline a scene in which the otherworldly intrudes upon the domestic. If the painters had the opportunity of having the lines of poetry on the print translated, this would have left them in no doubt that the engraving depicted a threatening and sexual scene:

> on his Night-Mare, thro the evening fog, flits the squab fiend o'er fen, and lake, and bog. Seeks some love-wilder'd maid, by sleep oppresst. Alights, and grinning, sits upon her breast.[11]

This excerpt from Erasmus Darwin's (1731–1802) *The Loves of the Plants* adds a narrative premise to the image, which would have underlined the otherworldly and threatening character of the print to the Cantonese artists.[12] If the painters were made aware of the meaning of the text, it is possible that they chose to adapt the color scheme to express this threat. Not inherently threatening to Western eyes, blue and green tones

10 Thomas Gaugin (1748–1812), *Plate 3: The Wanton in her Bed Chamber, from the series "Diligence and Dissipation,"* 1796, stipple engraving, 46.5×54.0 cm, engraving after James Northcote, British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.

have been used to illustrate the otherworldly in Chinese art for centuries. Until a satisfactory identification of the incubus in the reverse glass painting is achieved, it will remain difficult to establish whether the Cantonese painters were depicting a threatening scene or not. The choice of colors, however, is appropriate for Chinese depictions of nighttime and otherworldly scenes.

The deliberate alterations suggest that such reverse glass copies of Western engravings were produced in China for the local market, since Western demand for deliberately altered copies is unsubstantiated. A number of reverse glass paintings featuring reclining Chinese women in titillating postures, wearing diaphanous clothing and surrounded by draperies do survive. However, they have not been collected and researched by large art institutions and therefore, sadly, remain somewhat shadowy as a group.[13] Nevertheless, they represent a category among nineteenth-century Chinese reverse glass paintings to which paintings of reclining Western women might be related. Rupprecht Mayer suggests that reverse glass paintings of Western and Chinese women were being produced for a local market in the 1820s.[14] Although little is known of this pattern of production, it is likely that Western prints of women would have played a role in the creation of such paintings. Prints of reclining women asleep and awake, often with their arms raised above their head and partially loose hair, abounded in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe (fig. 10). *The Nightmare* and

The Awakening could thus be indicative of a wider trend toward the adaptation of engravings of Western women as titillatingly voyeuristic images for a Chinese market. Certainly, enough Western engraved models for such paintings existed in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

The Nightmare is a fascinating painting meriting far more attention than it has received to date. The 1810–1850 date places *The Nightmare* in a transformative period for Chinese reverse glass painting about which little is known. The examination of the stages of transmission has shown conclusively that *The Nightmare* is not an inferior copy of a Western painting, but a deliberately altered copy of a Western engraving. The examination of the colors suggests that the deliberate alterations were influenced by Chinese customs of representing the time of day and the threat of the otherworldly. This implies that patterns of transmission in nineteenth-century Canton were more complex than previously supposed. Such patterns might include deliberate alterations for the purpose of depicting Western scenes in a more relatable Chinese fashion, or the adaptation of engraved images to commercially salable series or pairs of paintings, such as *The Nightmare* and *The Awakening* might be. The existence of *The Awakening* certainly implies that there may be more extant deliberately altered or partially copied reverse glass paintings, and that there was a market for just such altered paintings of Western women in nineteenth-century China. It is hoped that the unusual examples among reverse glass paintings will become the focus of further academic research, since paintings such as *The Nightmare* have the potential to reveal hitherto unknown facets of the production of and markets for reverse glass paintings in the nineteenth century.

1 For simplicity's sake the crouching figure in the reverse glass painting is referred to in this paper as the "incubus," although the identity of the figure in the reverse glass painting is ambiguous.
2 Steger et al. 2019, 4026.
3 Audric 2020, 113.
4 Thierry Audric, email message to Elisabeth Eibner, 6 November 2020. In fact, there are two further dates associated with *The Nightmare*. A New Jersey auctioneer dated it 1790. In Audric's publication *Chinese Reverse Glass Painting 1720–1820* the date is given as ca. 1810. This is indicative of the ambiguity surrounding dating Chinese reverse glass paintings.
5 Knowles 1831, 64.
6 Weinglass 1994, 55.
7 Physical comparison of the exact dimensions and spacing ratios between the prints and the reverse glass painting could indicate which print was used and whether the engraving was traced or copied freehand onto glass.
8 Weinglass 1994, 57.
9 Thierry Audric, email message to Elisabeth Eibner, 6 November 2020.
10 To date, no exact model has been found.
11 The British Museum, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1873-1213-620> (accessed on 15 February 2021).

12 The British Museum, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1873-1213-620> (accessed on 15 February 2021).
13 Audric 2020, 69–70.
14 Mayer 2017, 12.

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CONTEXTUAL STUDIES OF REVERSE GLASS PAINTING

9

VARIETIES OF REPLICATION IN CHINESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTING

Jessica Lee Patterson

Abstract

One distinctive characteristic of reverse glass painting is the ease with which the medium facilitates the making of copies. Documentary and visual evidence suggests that copying was practiced extensively in Chinese glass-painting workshops of the nineteenth century. Numerous copies can still be observed in surviving sets, such as the Chinese glass paintings preserved in the *ubosot* (Ordination Hall) of Wat Phra Chetuphon in Bangkok. Close examination of the pictures in this set reveals a wide spectrum of different types of copies, ranging from the use of shared templates, to variations on a common theme, to modern mechanical reproductions. The paper concludes that templates were used very extensively in the making of this set, and the pattern of installation demonstrates that this form of mass production was highlighted and admired.

Keywords

Wat Pho, glass paintings, Pearl River Delta, export art

In Karina Corrigan's chapter in this volume, "The Governor of Surat and the Apotheosis of Washington," she discusses the circumstances surrounding the production of a hundred copies of Gilbert Stuart's (1755–1828) portrait of George Washington by a Cantonese reverse glass painting workshop, intended for the American market.[1] This incident led to a copyright infringement case initiated by the outraged artist, who had not authorized the reproductions.

That it should have been a set of Chinese reverse paintings on glass implicated in this early American copyright scandal will not surprise those familiar with the manufacture of art in this medium. The transparent ground of glass paintings made them an ideal vehicle for the reproduction of images from standardized templates or even for the adaptation of images from other media. What is more remarkable is the speed and scale at which the Chinese paintings were produced. According to Stuart's own testimony, he sold his oil portrait to the captain of the *Connecticut* in March 1801. Given the long

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110711776-011

duration of the journey to China and back, the copies on glass must all have been produced within a month or two, given that they were flooding the American market a little over a year later. This incident suggests that by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the glass painting industry in Canton was already well-established and capable of rapid mass production of images. The close resemblance of the few surviving glass paintings from this set, both to one another and to Stuart's oil portraits, demonstrates the refined technique of the anonymous glass painters and the processes they employed.

Although China's chief trading port of the early nineteenth century appears to have been equipped to produce large numbers of reverse glass paintings for the export market, only a fraction have survived to the present, mostly scattered between private collections and those few museums whose holdings include Chinese export art. Tantalizing similarities between images now in far-flung places raise questions about the kinds of copying practices involved in their production, but apart from the Washington portraits, it is rare in the West to come across a group of glass paintings that we can be confident were produced as a set. The ability to examine glass paintings in sets that were made at the same place and time could provide insights into the ways that copies were made and understood.

Large numbers of Chinese glass paintings were exported to Thailand during the first half of the nineteenth century, a period when the royal court in Bangkok both dominated the Sino-Siamese trade and led the fashion for imported Chinese luxuries. In that era, glass paintings were sufficiently ubiquitous in Thai palaces and temples that Western travelers wrote about their surprise at coming across copies of familiar images so far from home. "Many of these are copies of our best prints," commented one British envoy to Siam, who in 1822 encountered a number of Chinese glass paintings in the monastic residence of the abbot of Wat Ratcha Orot. He specifically mentioned noticing scenes of "a fox chase," "the charms of a country life," and "portraits of celebrated English beauties."[2] In 1825, another British diplomat observed a number of Chinese glass paintings, each depicting "a European officer or Lady," in the Hall of Audience of Bangkok's Royal Palace. It is significant that King Nangklao (Rama III, r. 1824–1851) can be connected with both sites, as he was the principal patron of Wat Ratcha Orot's renovations of early 1820s and the monarch that occupied the Hall of Audience thereafter. King Nangklao's active engagement in the China trade both before and after he assumed the throne is well known, and the fact that most of the extant glass paintings in Bangkok appear in the monasteries that he himself or his closest courtiers renovated indicate that he was importing large numbers of glass paintings for this purpose.[3] Monasteries are not museums, so although the specific dates and origins of the surviving works remain obscure and close physical examination has not yet been possible, visual and circumstantial evidence suggest that most of the works installed in any given temple were produced and imported in batches, not unlike the glass paintings of Washington that found their way to Philadelphia.

If the portraits of Washington all sought to achieve the closest possible resemblance to one another and to Stuart's original oil painting, this was likely at the request of the

purchaser, who hoped to profit from the sale of a popular image. But the sets of glass paintings in Thai monasteries show a fascinating variety of attitudes toward the replication of favored scenes. To date, I have not been able to find documents pertaining to the importation of these objects, so we are limited to circumstantial observations of the existing paintings. This is far from ideal, especially since there is much evidence of loss (numerous empty frames hanging at Wat Thepthidaram testify poignantly to this), but a sufficient number of paintings survive, still installed together in sets, that useful observations can be made.

To outline what I will explain in greater depth hereafter: among the Chinese glass paintings that were imported for the decoration of Thai Buddhist temples in the first half of the nineteenth century, close copies are relatively rare, exact copies are even rarer, while the great majority of paintings consist of compositions that depict the same subject matter but differ in the particulars of detail and arrangement. The latter might better be described as "variations on a theme" rather than as copies, but such variations together with closer copies can often be found within the same set, so together they comprise a broader spectrum of copying practices. The story of the hundred or so unauthorized copies of Gilbert Stuart's portrait of Washington demonstrates that the Chinese glass-painting workshops were well equipped to rapidly produce large numbers of identical copies of an image, if this is what the purchaser requested. That they did *not* do so in the case of most of the glass paintings that made their way to Siam, but took a more flexible and varied approach to copying, indicates that different expectations and priorities were in play, specifically an aesthetic that prized variations on a common theme.

In most cases, the sets of glass paintings in Bangkok's temples comprise a group of images based on a single theme, such as the bird-and-flower genre (Wat Pho *wihan*, Wat Suwannaram), abundant antiquities (Wat Arun, Wat Kanlayanamit, Wat Phichaiyat), or *Sanguo yanyi* (Wat Nangnong, Wat Thepthidaram). Within these coherent sets, only a few can be shown to have employed identical compositional templates, while the majority of the images follow the same compositional type while differing in structural details. The fact that some images *do* share the same compositional template suggests that these templates were available and part of standard glass-painting practice. This makes it less likely that the unique compositions within each set of pictures are *actually* unique, and more likely attests to the wide array of templates available to the artists.

The Wat Pho Pictures

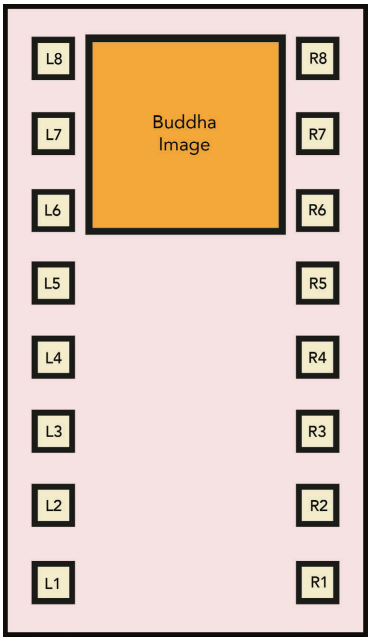
The framed pictures in the Ordination Hall of Wat Pho (Wat Phra Chetuphon) provide a useful case study for a variety of copying practices connected with reverse glass painting, ranging from the synchronic (workshop production employing shared compositional templates, compositional variations on common themes) to the diachronic (serial iterations of popular iconography, modern mechanical reproduction). With trios

1 Interior of the Ordination Hall of Wat Pho, Bangkok, Thailand. Photograph by Ninara of Helsinki, Finland, 28 December 2016. CC BY 2.0.

of images affixed to each of sixteen columns supporting the hall's high ceiling, they also comprise the largest extant set of Chinese reverse glass paintings that can still be found in a Thai Buddhist temple (fig. 1). The immense prestige of this temple and its popularity as a tourist destination means that the paintings are maintained in relatively good condition and are available for public viewing (although they are hung very high overhead and some are inaccessibly positioned around the sides and back of the large altar).

Of the forty-eight framed images in the Ordination Hall of Wat Pho, only one picture is wholly unique in both subject matter and composition. It is a landscape featuring four animals, two of them mythological.[4] The remaining forty-seven images are all either copies of various sorts, or variations on a theme, and may be sorted thematically into seven groups based on subject matter:

1. Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Thai: *Samkok*): sixteen pictures (nine different templates)
2. Canal scene, foreign enclave: eight pictures (same template)
3. Foreign Factories of Canton: six pictures (same background template)
4. Ships: seven pictures (six different templates)
5. Macao, Praya Grande: three pictures (same template)
6. Macao, isthmus view: three pictures (same template)
7. Dutch Folly: four pictures (mechanical reproductions?)



2 Layout of the columns in the ordination hall of Wat Pho (not to scale). A trio of pictures is affixed to each column. A *Samkok* scene tops each trio. The guide below describes the two bottom pictures and gives the page number to the illustration in Bunchob 1999.

L8. Ships (L + R), 233
L7. Canal (L), Ships (R), 241
L6. Praya Grande (L), Canal (R), 232
L5. Canal (L + R), 231
L4. Praya Grande (L + R), 230
L3. Factories (L + R), 229
L2. Canal (L + R), 228
L1. Macao isthmus (L + R), 227

R8. Dutch Folly (L + R), 234
R7. Dutch Folly (L + R), (see 234)
R6. Animals (L), Macao isthmus (R), 236
R5. Factories (L + R), 235
R4. Ships (L + R), 238
R3. Factories (L + R), 237
R2. Canal (L + R), 239
R1. Ships (L + R), 240

This list is an oversimplification, because "same template" simply means that there is some degree of direct correspondence between the compositional structures of the images in question, but the specific degree of correspondence varies markedly, often within the same thematic group, because of the range of different copying practices at play. Here is the full list of the kinds of copying I have identified among these pictures, and some of the scenes in which they are most clearly exemplified:

- Compositional Variations on Common Themes (*Samkok*, Foreign Ships)
- Shared Compositional Templates, minor variations (Canal scenes, Macao, some *Samkok*)
- Shared Compositional Templates, major variations (Foreign Factories)
- Serial Iterations of Popular Iconography (Foreign Factories, Macao)
- Modern Mechanical Reproduction (Dutch Folly and a few others)

Before we begin a detailed examination of the pictures, a brief word on their grouping and installation will be helpful (fig. 2). Affixed to the sixteen large internal columns of Wat Pho's Ordination Hall in groups of three, the images occupy custom gilt frames that organize them into a pyramidal arrangement. At the vertex of each trio is a fight scene from the Chinese literary epic, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (known in Thai and referred to hereafter as *Samkok*). The two images at the base are almost all images of Macao, Canton, and the Pearl River Delta (fig. 3).[5] The consistency of this organizational pattern establishes a visual and thematic unity throughout the installation.

That copies were prevalent among the Wat Pho pictures was not something that those who organized the installation attempted to hide. On the contrary, the abundance of copies is boldly emphasized by the fact that on eleven of the sixteen columns, identical pictures are paired together in the bottom row of the trios, and a preference for thematic similarity is still evident when exact matches were not possible. In the case of the *Samkok* pictures, even those that do not share the same template are all so similar

3 This example, from the third column on the left (L3), demonstrates how the pictures are framed together in trios, with a battle scene from *Samkok* at the vertex of each set of three.

4 Detail of the *Samkok* scene from the vertex of the trio on column L3.

to one another as to be effectively indiscernible without close examination. Every one of the fight scenes centers on the encounter between a pair of warriors on horseback flanked by several foot-soldiers wielding shields, weapons, and banners (fig. 4). To one side or the other are white military camp tents of a style used in the Qing dynasty.[6]

Samkok

The fact that nine different templates were used for the sixteen *Samkok* images demonstrates that the glass painters had access to a great variety of slightly varying options, even though the resulting compositions are extremely similar even in the cases where different templates were used. In cases where the templates were the same, the background and figures are structurally identical, but still vary in small decorative details, such as the precise hue and pattern of the clothing characters wear and

the banners they hold aloft. But for the most part, the color of the costumes and even the horses' coats are consistent between pictures made from the same template, suggesting that the artists exercised only a minor degree of creative latitude in the production of the Wat Pho pictures. It should also be noted that the five surviving glass paintings at Wat Thepthidaram (from what must have once been a much larger set, judging from the number of empty frames) are sufficiently similar to the *Samkok* images at Wat Pho to suggest a common origin, but only one of the five is a battle scene of the same type: the others are also from *Samkok*, but show more diplomatic encounters. This underscores the suggestion that the Wat Pho pictures were deliberately selected for their visual similarity, because the workshop must have had other types of scenes available in their repertoire.

Ships

The group of pictures that demonstrates the most variability within a common theme is the representation of ships navigating the Pearl River Delta. This is a particularly intriguing group because of the many types of vessels represented, both Chinese and foreign (primarily British), often in the same scene. In a few cases, these images have a visual artifact not observed elsewhere in the Wat Pho set: a painted border of dark blue with a lighter-hued inner edge surrounds the image within the physical frame, closely resembling the matting one might find surrounding a framed print. These borders are most evident in the images that give primary focus to a specific large British ship, and hint that these images might have been copied from contemporary ship portraits of Western origin (fig. 5). The other images of this group have no central focus, nor a compositional strategy in common, but depict a variety of ships and scenery. Prevalent in this group, together with a variety of Chinese craft and full-rigged Western sailing ships, are some Western vessels fitted with both sails and steam-powered paddle wheels. This was a transitional hybrid design that first appeared in the region in 1829.[7] The presence and prominence of this type of ship in the Wat Pho pictures (they also appear in the Foreign Factories and Macao scenes) suggest that these images most likely date from the 1830s or 1840s, consistent with the period during which the King of Siam, Rama III (r. 1824–1851), renovated numerous temples in Bangkok with Chinese design elements, including Wat Pho, and embellished them with reverse glass paintings.

Foreign Factories

The paintings of the Foreign Factories of Canton are those that most emphatically link the Wat Pho paintings with the broader scope of Chinese export art. This image type can be categorized in two ways. Synchronically, in relation to one another, these images are a fascinating study in the variability and perhaps modularity in the use of templates. Diachronically, in relation to the broader iconographic tradition of the

5 Trio featuring a pair of early hybrid steamships, located on column R4.

Foreign Factories scene, the images represent a late and highly condensed version of the salient features.

All six paintings of the Foreign Factories share the same template for the background, though since this is a depiction of a static row of buildings, it may be incidental to the scene rather than a deliberate design choice (see fig. 3). The foreground consistently depicts the Dutch Folly half out of frame on the far right, and the surface of the river crowded with a number of Chinese and Western vessels. This is where the pictures become especially interesting, because in regard to the specific type and arrangement of the boats, two pairs of pictures (hence four of the total six) are identical—sharing the same template for the entire scene—and the remaining two pictures differ slightly from both pairs as well as from one another. In one of the pairs, the two pictures are so completely identical in all respects, including discolorations that appear attributable to age, my suspicion is that one of the two is a mechanical copy.[8] But the other pair appears to be original glass paintings that were made by hand from identical templates, because there are noticeable variations in the smallest details, such as the arrangement of figures and foliage. Thus, the Foreign Factories group presents us with a similar situation as the *Samkok* pictures: whereas it might have been simpler to consistently use an identical template for all the images of the same type, instead multiple templates were employed even though the differences between them are minimal in terms of the overall visual impact of the images.

Images of Canton's foreign factories are excellent candidates for deeper study of copies, because variations of this stock image proliferated across decades, within a variety of

6 Trio featuring Macao's Praya Grande, located on column L4.

different media. Early versions of the image date back to the middle of the eighteenth century, and appear plain and naturalistic. By the turn of the nineteenth century the scene was frequently painted in gouache, oil, and other media including glass, and artists increasingly condensed and elaborated the view to make it more exciting, enlarging the size of the buildings, filling the river with a wide variety of ships, and even compounding the scene with other popular local sights, such as the Dutch Folly and the five-story pagoda, that were not actually visible from that vantage. This compounded version of the scene is distinctly the predecessor for the iconography used the Wat Pho painting, with one peculiar anomaly. The Wat Pho images of the Foreign Factories consistently place the Dutch flag between that of Denmark and the United States, transposing its usual position with that of the Spanish flag seen in all of Crossman's examples.[9] If indeed the Dutch flag was never historically in this position, this might be a copying error that subsequently proliferated throughout this particular workshop.

Macao

Among the glass paintings in the *ubosot* (Ordination Hall) of Wat Pho are six images of Macao based on two different templates, with three representations of each. One template depicts a narrow isthmus view of Macao's foreign settlement, the other features the Praya Grande (fig. 6). Two matched pairs of each image type are paired together in the bottom row of their respective trios, reinforcing the preference for matching like with like that runs consistently through the installation.[10]

7 Trio featuring Macao's isthmus, located on column L1. The picture in the lower left appears to be a mechanical reproduction of the lower right-hand picture on L6 (see Bunchob 1999, 236), exactly reproducing the crack in the glass, but the tones of this image are distinctly faded.

Like the Foreign Factories, the Macao pictures participate in both diachronic and synchronic modes of copying. Diachronically, both the Macao isthmus and the Praya Grande are the heirs of an established iconography for each scene, though in these pictures it has been greatly simplified and condensed. Evidence of mechanical reproduction in the case of one of the isthmus scenes (copied from another of the three), also falls into the diachronic mode (fig. 7). The remaining two isthmus scenes and all three of the Praya Grande pictures fall into what I am calling the synchronic mode, i.e., they appear to have been copies of the same generation produced together in a workshop using identical templates, but discernible through tiny incidental variations: differences in the array of sails or flags on ships; subtle discrepancies of foliage; the inconsistent coloration, number or position of human figures.

Canal Scene

The final group that I want to discuss are the pictures that I am tentatively calling a "Canal scene, foreign enclave." With eight pictures sharing the same template, this scene makes up a significant proportion of the Wat Pho pictures (fig. 8). My supposition is that it is likewise a scene from somewhere in the region of the Pearl River Delta, in keeping with the general theme of the set, but I have yet to find a predecessor for

8 Two examples of the "Canal scene," details of the pictures on the lower left from R2 (here top) and L2 (here bottom).

the iconography that would help identify the specific place represented. The architecture is very similar to that depicted in the Foreign Factories and Macao scenes, but in all cases the buildings are so simplified and stylized that it seems safer to regard them as a schematic abstraction than a careful study of place. The clothes and hair of the tiny figures suggest that they are meant to represent Europeans, and the most distinctive clue is the Danish flag on the central boat, a modestly-sized vessel with a furled sail on a single mast, and some bundles of cargo in the stern. This might suggest a location near the Danish Factory, were it not for the presence of light-haired women, as foreign women were prohibited from entering Canton. Two smaller boats on either

side are operated by standing figures maneuvering their craft with long poles, and this detail, plus the constructed appearance of the waterway, suggests that it is a canal, albeit a very short one that ends abruptly after traversing only enough distance to accommodate about five buildings on either side. Perhaps in time we will identify the place depicted. In the meantime, we can compare all eight versions to one another. Six of the eight are installed together in matched pairs.[11] The two that are not paired appear to be mechanical reproductions of one of the original glass paintings, given that they precisely reproduce not only its trivial details, but also the large crack that runs vertically at a slight diagonal through its center (see fig. 8, whose lower image appears to be the original of the reproductions on L6 and L7). All the matched pairs are probably from the original set: though they were painted from an identical template, telltale tiny variations pervade the placement and costume of the figures and the smallest details of foliage and architecture.

Conclusion

Through both imagery and installation, the Wat Pho pictures demonstrate that copying was integral to the production and reception of this set of glass paintings. In regard to production, the numerous templates identifiable among this set attest to their widespread usage in glass-painting workshops. The existence of multiple, highly similar templates for popular scenes such as *Samkok* and the Foreign Factories satisfies a visual aesthetic that privileges the variation of minor details within a thematically and compositionally unified structure. The same aesthetic principle is characteristic of a great many of the temple murals commissioned by Rama III, who was likewise the patron of Wat Pho's renovations in the 1830s. At Wat Pho, this visual aesthetic of variety within unity is reinforced by a regular pattern of installation that highlights and calls attention to the proliferation of copies among the set. Modern eyes jaded by mass production might dismiss the artistic value of copies, but in Third Reign Siam (1824–1851), the ability to acquire large sets of very similar pictures must have been an admirable novelty. It is tempting to wonder if the distinctive aesthetic of mass-produced Chinese glass paintings—variations of detail within a unifying thematic and compositional structure—could have inspired the prevalence of a similar aesthetic in the era's mural paintings.

1 Cao 2020. Images of the Washington portraits can be found here. For more details and a transcription of the court documents in the Stuart's copyright case, see Richardson 1970.

2 Crawfurd 1830, 202–3.

3 For a more thorough treatment of which monasteries exhibit Chinese glass paintings and of which genres, see Patterson 2016. Wat Prayun should also be added to the list.

4 For an illustration of the anomalous image, see Bunchob 1999, 236, lower left. This book is an invaluable resource for the study of paintings throughout the Ordination Hall, and reproduces images of fifteen out of the sixteen trios of glass paintings on pages 226–241. The trio not shown

in the book is, if I have correctly assessed the matter, identical to the trio on page 234. However, after comparing the illustrations in the book with my own photographs, I began to suspect that the trio on page 234 is the mechanical reproduction of the trio not shown, rather than vice versa. Note how the frame on page 234 subtly differs from all the others; it has a slightly different design and shinier gilding, with bright red paint in the crevices to highlight the gold. It is also apparent from the identical patterns of wear that the two images of the Dutch Folly in the bottom row of the trio on page 234 were mechanically reproduced, either one from the other or both from a prior image. From a comparison with my own photographs, it does appear that the trio omitted from *The Ubosot of Wat Pho* is identical in imagery to that depicted on page 234, but in an older frame congruent with the rest of the set.

5 Although at first glance this trio might appear to be the same as that published as figure 9 in Patterson 2016, it is in fact a different trio. This is image is on column L3, and the previously published image is on column R3. Note that not only are the trios nearly identical, but they mirror one another in symmetrical positions across the room. This detail emphasizes the way copies were used to lend regularity and order to the arrangement of the pictures.

6 The lower structure of these tents is never visible, but the design of the upper portions resemble the yurts used by Emperor Qianlong in his southern tours; see Chang 2015.

7 "The first steamship to be seen in China was the *Forbes,* also built at Calcutta and launched in 1829," see Blue 1973, 47. The renovations of Wat Pho under Rama III took place from 1832 to 1846, see Arts Department 1992.

8 See Bunchob 1999, page 235 (lower right), which I take to be a mechanical copy of the painting on page 237 (lower right). In contrast, I suspect that the pictures on page 235 (lower left) and page 229 (lower right) are coeval, hand-painted copies from identical templates.

9 In Appendix C of Crossman 1972, 259–265, the author compares nineteen different versions of this scene in an attempt to establish a reliable chronology. The version whose imagery is the closest antecedent to the Wat Pho version is a glass painting dated circa 1790–1800, now in the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum.

10 See Bunchob 1999, 227 and 230 for the matched pairs. The remaining two images are on 232 and 236. The isthmus view on the left on 237 appears to be a mechanical reproduction of the one on 236, but the remaining isthmus view and all three harbor views are distinct from one another.

11 See Bunchob 1999, 228, 231, 239.

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10

REFLECTING ASIA
THE RECEPTION OF CHINESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTING IN BRITAIN, 1738–1770

Patricia F. Ferguson

Abstract

Chinese reverse painted glass mirrors have eluded a concise chronological study. Most histories are based on the dating of the European frames in the absence of any other key diagnostic features, artist's signatures or inscribed dates, yet these decorative paintings were frequently reframed as tastes changed over time, discarding their original hardwood and lacquer frames which may have offered critical information. This paper relies on archival material in the form of auction advertisements, historic house provenances, and documents from the English East India Company to establish that Chinese painted mirrors or looking glasses were imported into England as early as the late 1730s, and in the process identifies features associated with a specific early workshop. The documentary evidence underscores the agency of the maritime elite in the patronage of these novel luxuries, during their peak period of production from 1740 through 1770.

Keywords

Decorative Art, Country House, Chinese Reverse Painted Glass

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Chinese artists painting on European plate-glass mirrors for the domestic and export markets was a remarkable cultural exchange. Executed in European style oil paints and frequently depicting genre scenes of "authentic" Chinese interiors and courtly figures in landscapes with parallels in contemporary European painting, these images challenged the trope of condescending imaginary chinoiseries. When reframed in Europe with elaborate giltwood frames in the rococo taste, the result is a distinctive hybridity that defies easy classification (fig. 1). As a result, the subject has been little studied within the arts of China or even histories of the export trade that is until the

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1 *Two Women Reading with Maid-servant by the Water's Edge*, Canton, mid-eighteenth century, reverse glass painted mirror with papier-mâché frame, London, overall dimensions 166.4 × 89.5 cm.

recent publication of Thierry Audric, *Chinese Reverse Painted Glass, 1720–1820: An Artistic Meeting Between China and the West* (2020). Most authors, including Audric, frame its production and consumption within the period 1750 to 1800.[1] However, British auction advertisements, private accounts and records of the Honourable English East India Company (HEIC), confirm that exports of Chinese "glass paintings" had clearly begun by the late 1730s and increased in the 1740s, yet there are almost no published examples attributed to this early period.[2] In order to develop further its early history and chronology, this paper surveys examples of Chinese reverse glass paintings with important documentary provenances in historic collections in the United Kingdom, including The National Trust, and, relying heavily on Audric's corpus, identifies several diagnostic features associated with a specific artist or workshop(s), which supplied English-speaking merchants in the earliest decades of its production.

English Looking Glass Abroad

From 1720, skilled artisans in China, specifically Canton (now Guangzhou), had developed a new technique of painting in reverse on imported European glass mirrors by scrapping away the silvered reflective coating made from an amalgam of tin and mercury (or quicksilver) following drawn designs. Initially, it may have been a clever reuse of costly mirrored glass that had loss some of its silvering during transport caused by

2 Large mirror assembled from seven panels, overpainted with Marotesque baskets of flowers and foliage in oil paints by Jean-Antoine Monnoyer, London, 1710–1720, overall dimensions including frame 186 x 158.5 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, W.36:1 to 3-1934.

damp leading to the corrosion of the tin. In Europe, the technique of reverse painting on glass has a long tradition, but was relatively rare on expensive mirrors, known as "looking glasses." The earliest reference to the technique in China appears in 1722, when a dignitary, possibly from Canton, sent mirrors painted with "flowers along the edges" as tribute to the Kangxi emperor; subsequent tributes, in 1731 and 1733, also mention floral motifs on painted glass, but examples have yet to be identified.[3] These early designs evidently appealed to the Emperor and his courtiers, but they may in fact represent the taste of wealthy Canton merchants and officials, the so-called "port barons," for whom the work was initially created and where the technique originated.
By the early eighteenth century, England had moved from a second-rate glass producer dependent upon continental sources to a level of world domination as an exporter. As early as 1709, HEIC documents record ship captains bound for China requesting permission to include looking glasses as part of their private trade; these may have been given as gifts to Canton officials or directly exchanged with local merchants for Chinese trade goods.[4] In 1711, John Gumley (1672–1729), a leading London supplier of mirrors and pier glasses, sent £100 of looking glasses to India on *Tyrall* to be sold in China; the venture was not successful however.[5] By the 1720s, there were numerous references to HEIC ship captains and supercargoes including "looking glasses" as part of their private trade.[6] These English mirrors may have resembled those forming a large mirror, c. 1710–1720, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (fig. 2).[7] In di-

mensions frequently found among Chinese glass paintings, seven rectangular panes of glass were assembled to form a large mirror. Its ornamental design of floral festoons, attributed to the painter Antoine Monnoyer (1672–1747), also has parallels to a group of Chinese designs with vertical garlands (fig. 9), however, the English mirror was painted in oils on the front of the glass, a fugitive technique, rather than the reverse.

Early European Documentary References to Chinese Painted Looking Glasses

The earliest mention in the HEIC archives identifying Chinese reverse glass paintings arriving into England was in January/February 1738/1739, when Captain Robert Bootle (ca. 1694–1758), of the *London* (1723–1739), an East Indiaman, returned from China with "6 Glass Pictures, 10 Tales," along with a large quantity of Chinese furniture: "18 Rosewood Chairs, 1 Ditto table, 2 Ditto Cabinets, 105 Tale," and "5500 Prints, 330 Tales."[8] As part of his private trade, the glass pictures and furniture may have furnished his home in Hatton Garden, London, or else been acquired on behalf of others, such as his elder brother, the MP and attorney Sir Thomas Bootle (1685–1753), who had only recently built Lathom House, a grand Palladian mansion in Lancashire. While Robert Bootle later became a director of the HEIC, his younger brother Matthew (d. 1747), sailed to Canton in 1744–1745 as commander of the *London*; both could have acted as agents for their eldest brother's affluent and influential clients, who included the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Somerset, and Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough.

In Canton, high-ranking agents of the HEIC would have socialized with their equals in the Swedish East India Company (Svenska Ostindiska Companiet or SOIC), which included many British-born employees, the Dutch East India Company, the Danish Asiatic Company (Asiatisk Kompagni or DAK), and other foreigners. Their latest acquisitions of curious Asian luxuries must have influenced their shared tastes.[9] In 1738/1739, the Scotsman and SOIC supercargo, Charles Irvine of Drum (1693–1771) recorded the purchase in Canton, as part of his private trade: "for 18 painted glass with lacquered frames paid to Quouqua at 2 taels 2 maes each, 39.600 Taels" and "for 6 painted glass with Rosewood frames paid to Quouqua at 2 taels each, 12.000 Taels."[10] Quouqua was a Canton artisan or shop owner, who offered a selection of lacquered or rosewood frames along with painted mirrors. The suffix *qua* (or *guan* in Mandarin) at the end of his name, associates him with hundreds of other Hong merchants licensed to trade with foreigners, who had purchased civil degrees, and had the right to be called "Mandarin," which raised their social status.[11] Until his return to Aberdeen in 1757, Irvine traded internationally on behalf of merchants in London, Paris, and Amsterdam.[12]

Until recently, the only other named Canton glass painter from this early period was "Siou Sing Saang" described by the architect Sir William Chambers (1723–1796) in *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils* as the "celebrated Chinese master."[13] The architect had apparently employed him to paint examples of Chinese dress on glass, providing the inspiration for the costume plates in his

3 *Woman Smoking by a Window with a Boy and a Parrot*, Canton, mid-eighteenth century, reverse glass painted mirror with giltwood frame, inscribed "Present af Fru Grave till E.P:s" (Gift of Mrs. Grave to E.P:s), overall dimensions 49 × 39 cm.

publication. Chambers was in China twice with the SOIC in 1743–1745 and 1748–1749, when he must have seen the richly detailed costumes in reverse glass painted genre scenes and landscapes. In a paper on Cantonese artisans and merchant, Paul Van Dyke has proposed that "Siou Sing Saang" is the business name used by "the famous Chinese painter Laqua" (*Chineserne berömde malare Laqva*); his shop and residence was identified on a Swedish map of Canton dated 1748–1749.[14] Chambers had conversations on gardening with "Lepqua, a celebrated Chinese painter," which van Dyke, suggests is another spelling of Laqua; the artisan was clearly active between 1740 and 1760, however, no work has as yet been attributed to him.[15] Who, for example, painted figures 3 and 4, stylistically of the 1740s to 1760s, but representing two very different hands or workshop(s)?

Evidence of the process of commissioning early painted mirrors appears in a letter dated 17 March 1740.[16] It was written in Gothenburg, Sweden, by another Scotsman Hugh Campbell (d. 1754), a major shareholder and a director of the SOIC, to Charles Irvine, supercargo of the *Ridderhus (Riddarhuset)* about to embark for Canton. The letter requests "2 pairs of painted looking glass of the model herewith send you." It may have been for portraits, as there is a small group of full-length portraits of Europeans associated with the SOIC, executed around 1740, which include a pair of portraits

4 *Chinese Couple in an Elite Interior*, Canton, mid-eighteenth century, reverse glass painting within a japanned toilet mirror frame, London, 60×53 cm, Lazenby Collection, Marble Hill House, English Heritage.

of John Pike and his wife, ca. 1743, now in the Sjöhistorika Museet, Stockholm.[17] A former servant of the HEIC, Pike (act. ca. 1725–ca. 1751) was a supercargo in the service of the SOIC and made five trips to China between 1732–1744/45; he sailed on the *Calmar* to Canton in 1741–1743, when his portraits may have been ordered.[18] Campbell's commission is contemporary with Pike's portrait, and he may have provided a watercolor drawing, miniature on ivory, hand-colored-engraving or a combination of sources as a model.

Another portrait from the SOIC group is of a seated gentleman in a red jacket and a white wig, clearly from the same workshop as the Pike portraits, if not by the same hand; now in the Richard Milhender Collection.[19] Audric has speculated that it is the Scottish merchant and entrepreneur Colin Campbell (1686–1757), brother of Hugh Campbell.[20] In 1731, Colin Campbell cofounded the Swedish East India Company and was its first director; he visited Canton numerous times between 1732 and 1747, and worked with Pike. Colin Campbell's will mentions that he owned "pictures on glass."[21] A comparison of the depiction of the faces in these three portraits, the objects on the table and the treatment of the trees with their foliage resembling broccoli-like florets with fine extended branches sometimes with white flowers, are typical diagnostic features of an unidentified workshop active in the 1740s and 1750s (see fig. 1).

Among the early documentary references for the English appreciation of Chinese reverse glass mirrors, cited by Audric and others, is the description, dated 1763, of "painted looking glasses from China" found in the White House, on the outskirts of London at Kew, a British royal residence remodeled in the 1730s by the architect William Kent (1685–1748), deputy surveyor of the King's Works.[22] In his *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew in Surry; The Seat of Her Royal Highness The Princess Dowager of Wales* (1763), Chambers described, the largest space, The Gallery, a long room on the principal floor of the White House designed decades earlier for his Royal Highness, Frederick, Prince of Wales. It was "hung with grotesque paintings and children in theatrical dresses by the late John Ellis. The chimney piece and all the furniture are from designs of Mr. Kent; and on the piers between the windows are four large painted looking glasses from China."[23] The White House was demolished in 1802, and these mirrors have not been identified in the Royal Collection; however, the four large Chinese "looking glasses" may have been in the royal household for decades. On 24 May 1747, Benjamin Goodison (ca. 1700–1767), royal cabinetmaker to George II, billed the Prince of Wales for supplying "Four Carv'd frames for ye Indian glafses & painted & Guilt: & fitting & fastening ye Glafses to ditto: at 20 guineas each, 84:0:0."[24] The four "Indian glasses" were presumably the "four large painted looking glasses from China" acquired in Canton during the 1745/46 season or earlier, perhaps commissioned as a gift for the Prince of Wales by the directors of the HEIC.[25]

Another early reference to Chinese painted mirrors in England was recorded in 1764 by the French lawyer, Jean-Baptiste-Jacques Élie de Beaumont (1732–1786), who was visiting Walpole House, on Paradise Row, in Chelsea, then a rural retreat; it was formerly owned by the late Sir Robert Walpole (1676–1745), Britain's *de facto* first prime minister between 1725 and 1742.[26] In 1759, the property had been acquired by the wealthy merchant, member of parliament (1765–1774), and art connoisseur George René Aufrère (1715–1801). Élie de Beaumont's description of the house and its estate captures the fashion for all thing Chinese in elite homes in the mid-eighteenth century:

> The Chinese furniture, the tiles, the hothouses, the bird menagerie and particularly the pheasants from China are all very worthy of attention, but I especially admired the mirrors sent from England to China and brought back with Chinese paintings done on the reverse of the mirror, with as much precision as if they had been done on the top.[27]

The mirrors may have belonged to Walpole; however, the house and its contents were offered for sale following his death, on 13 April 1747, and Aufrère, an important wealthy collector, may have acquired them through other networks.

The Second-hand Market for Chinese Reverse Painted Looking Glasses in Britain

British newspaper advertisements announcing auction sales provide yet another important resource for the reception of Chinese reverse glass paintings in England. Be-

tween 1–11 March 1748, the *General Advertiser* announced the upcoming London auction on 9 and 14 March 1748, of the "genuine Oriental Curiosities and other Valuable Effects of Richard Martyn, Esq; deceased, late Supercargoe to the Honourable the East India Company," which included "A large Collection of Chinese Paintings, some on Looking–Glafs Plate"[28]; his final voyage to Canton was in 1743 as supercargo of the *Haeslingfield*. The sartorial Martyn, as evidenced by the large wardrobe of rich wearing apparel trimmed with gold plate buttons, had collected Chinese paintings on paper, such as views of the river in Canton and processions, as well "Portraits of the different Habits of the Chinese, from the Emperor down to the peasants,"[29] a subject which had also interested Chambers. By 1748, mirror paintings were desirable commodities warranting mention in a costly advertisement aimed at the auction-going *beau monde*.

East India Company captains and supercargoes were the source for these luxury goods. Their purchases were typically commissioned by London merchants and private customers, or to furnish their own homes. On 16 March 1761, the *Public Advertiser* announced the dispersal by auction of the collection of "curious Chinese Paintings on Glafs," belonging to the late Captain Benjamin Fisher (d. 1760), of the *Drake,* an East Indiaman, who had died six months before on his return voyage from Canton. The auctioneer noted that the goods were collected over several voyages, Fisher having sailed to Canton in 1751–1752 and 1754–1756. An anonymous sale in the same broadside on 20 March 1761, highlighted "some curious and large India Paintings on Plate-Glass, of the Chinese Nobility," along with "India pictures of Landscapes, &c., for Hangings."[30] The auction of the household furniture of Thomas Saunders (1713–1775), removed from his country seat at Brill House, Oxfordshire, announced in the *Public Advertiser* on 26 October 1776, "magnificent Rofewood Desks and Book–cafes, the Fronts of which are adorned with Chinese Paintings on Plate Glafs." Examples of Chinese-made padouk or rosewood English-style bureau-cabinets with pairs of Chinese painted mirror panels in the upper sections, typically date from the mid-eighteenth century.[31] Between 1750 and 1755, Saunders had been the governor of Fort St. George (now Chennai, formerly known as Madras, in Tamil Nadu) and may have acquired such furniture in India, commissioned by HEIC agents. Wealthy British expatriates working in India were obvious consumers of glass pictures, which, unlike paper, were not consumed by pests.[32]

Historic British Collections with Chinese Reverse Painted Looking Glasses

The above maps up to the 1750s the documentary evidence for the increasing availability of Chinese reverse glass painted mirrors, new and second-hand, offering context for the examples found in historic English collections. Saltram House, in Devon (The National Trust), near Portsmouth, a significant naval and merchant port, has one of the richest collections of Chinese decorative art and chinoiserie interiors with Chinese wallpaper, furniture in the Chinese Chippendale style, and two large sets of Chinese

5 *Two Women Reading by the Water's Edge*, Canton, 1745–1755, reverse glass painting with giltwood frame, London, ca. 1757, overall dimensions 106 × 66 cm, Saltram House, Devon.

painted mirrors.[33] The first, a set of eight were framed around the same time as some of the Chinese wallpaper was installed: one of the mirrors has been found to be backed with a sheet of wrapping paper, inscribed, "bird & fflowers cut out / of India paper for filling / in vacancys in other paper / March 1757" (fig. 5).[34] The set comprises six large mirrors (106 by 66 centimeters) and two smaller, and all are mounted in identical elaborate giltwood rococo frames with slight variations in the design of the smaller two. The mirrors and wallpapers were part of the remodeling in the 1750s of Saltram under the heiress Lady Catherine Parker (1706–1758), who had married John Parker (1703–1768). The set may have furnished one or perhaps two rooms in the manner of continental miniatures cabinets, such as the Millionenzimmer, Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna, or Miss Leigh' Bedchamber at Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire, both dating from the 1760s.[35] With the exception of one three-quarter length portrait of a single female beauty, all seven depict full-length groups of relaxed and naturalistic figures using perspective and shading to create depth and volume. They were clearly executed in the same workshop, probably by the same hand or hands, between 1745 and 1755. These depictions of young women, sometimes with children, each with distinct costumes, coiffures, and jewelry, indicating their ethnicity and social status—Han and Manchu, courtesans and concubines—in landscapes with the same foliage of rounded florets and

6 *Man and Woman on a Terrace*, Canton, 745–1765, reverse glass painting with gilt lacquer frame, overall dimensions 46.8 × 42.2 cm, Saltram House, Devon.

protruding flowering branches depicted in the Pike portraits of the early 1740s. Only one picture depicts a male figure, a fisherman, in conversation with a coquettish female maidservant, possibly based on a popular drama. None of the eight scenes are duplicates, but similar scenes from the same workshop with the distinctive foliage are found elsewhere, so they are not unique works of art.[36] An example repeating the scene of the two woman reading was formerly in the collection of the Stirlings of Keir and Cadder, Glasgow merchants and Jamaican plantation owners (fig. 1).[37] The vases of flowers and bowl of fruit on the ledge in both again recall details in the portraits of the Pikes and of Colin Campbell.[38] It was possibly acquired by Archibald Stirling of Keir (1710–1783), who made his fortune in India, between 1735 and 1748. Wealthy Chinese merchants with a global outlook may have been the intended market for this genre, influenced by exotic European art.

The second set at Saltram includes six smaller reverse painted mirrors (46.8 by 42.2 centimeters) clearly by a different hand or from a different workshop, but probably of roughly similar date, ca. 1745–1765 (fig. 6).[39] Each depicts an elegant woman intimately posed with elderly or overweight men, perhaps Daoist immortals such as Li Tieguai or alternatively scenes from popular dramas, which may have been more erotic in tone. Margaret Jourdain and R. Soame Jenyns suggested that these early examples were for

7 *Elegant Woman with Chickens by the Waters' Edge*, reverse glass painting, Canton, mid-eighteenth century, carved giltwood overmantel frame made by John Linnell, after a design by Robert Adam, c.1767, dimensions of mirror 134 × 175 cm, Osterley Park, Hounslow.

Chinese consumption and may have decorated *maison tolérée,* or theaters.[40] Such risqué scenes may have been read by Europeans as a type of Hogarthian Harlot's Progress. While again, none are duplicates, they are not unique and similar examples appear elsewhere, often with their original Chinese gold-painted lacquer frames.[41] Whether purchased from a London merchant or commissioned through HEIC agents based in nearby Portsmouth, the large set is a powerful comment on Lady Catherine Parker's cultural and commercial networks.[42]

At Osterley Park, in Hounslow, a large mansion house just west of London, described in 1772 as having been furnished with "a profusion of rich China and Japan I could almost fancy myself in Peking,"[43] there is just one Chinese reverse painting on mirrored glass (fig. 7).[44] It is installed in the Yellow Taffeta Bedchamber, the principal guest room on the first floor, where it is set into an early neoclassical overmantel frame, carved and gilded by John Linnell (1729–1796), after a design executed in 1767 by the architect Robert Adam; it is en suite with a larger unpainted pier glass on the opposite wall between the windows.[45] The painted overmantel mirror was recorded in the 1782 inventory of Osterley, as "An India Painting on Plate Glass with an elegant carved and gilt frame."[46] Osterley was owned by a banking dynasty, the Child family, directors of the HEIC since the early 1700s, which allowed them to place orders for commodities

8 Overmantel glass with three Chinese reverse glass paintings, mid-eighteenth century, pine with oil gilding, London, Jean-Antoine Cuenot, 1753–1756, width 206 cm.

through the captains or supercargoes they invested in as their private trade. In 1769, James Christie advertised an auction of Captain Frederick Vincent (d. 1785), late commander of the *Osterley* (1757–1770), an East Indiaman merchant ship, which included "some high finished paintings on plate glass."[47] Francis Child (1735–1763) was one of four owners of the *Osterley*, when Captain Vincent sailed to Canton in 1757–58, 1760–61, and 1768–69.[48] The painted mirror may have been acquired by Francis Child before 1763, and after his death in 1767, it was installed in its fashionable Adam-designed frame by his brother, Robert Child (1739–1782), who succeeded him and inherited the estate.

Its horizontal format, rarely found among the "floret" group, includes an elegantly dressed lady seated by the waters' edge on low rockwork with chickens in the foreground and buildings in the distance.[49] It is similar to three examples at Arundel Castle, West Sussex, incorporated into an elaborate rococo giltwood framed overmantel mirror (fig. 8).[50] The Arundel versions are "conversation pieces" with multiple figures of Mandarins and servants, a type associated with Audric's Music-Poetry group. The frame was supplied to Edward Howard, 9th Duke of Norfolk (1686–1777), between 1753 and 1756, by the carver Jean Antoine Cuenot (act. 1744–1762), to decorate Norfolk House, in St. James's Square, removed to Arundel in the 1930s. It was identified as a "Chimney Trumo Glass Frame" by Cuenot and furnished the "intirely Chinese"[51] dressing room, as it was so described in 1756, of Mary Blount, Duchess of Norfolk (ca. 1712–1773).[52]

At Harewood, home of the Lascelles family, Earls of Harewood, near Leeds in Yorkshire, there was also just one Chinese mirror painting. It was set into an overmantel in

the State Bedchamber in a giltwood frame made by Chippendale around 1770–1772.[53] It was described in an 1819 guidebook as "Over a most beautiful ornamented chimneypiece of white marble, is an elegant Indian glass, adorned with their king, queen and attendants."[54] It was actually formed of two mirror paintings: a Chinese noblewoman seated on a chair with female attendants on a veranda overlooking a lake and another of a Chinese nobleman resting on a daybed with male attendants in the same setting.[55] These representations of wealthy Canton "port barons" recall the "Indian Paintings ... of the Chinese Nobility" offered for sale in 1761. English cabinetmakers were presumably supplied with costly Chinese painted mirrors by their patrons in the same way they were supplied with panels from Oriental lacquer screen to be refashioned as veneer on case furniture. The pair of mirrors at Harewood may have been made a decade or two before Chippendale's frame was added.

In early literature on Chinese reverse glass paintings, the half-dozen examples at Shugborough Hall, Staffordshire, are often cited as the earliest recorded, presumed to have been acquired in Canton in 1743 by Admiral Sir George Anson (1697–1762), 1st Baron Anson of Soberton, during his famous circumnavigation of the globe, 1740–1744.[56] However, there is no evidence the Admiral Anson purchased them and if he did, it may have been after 1747 when he claimed his prize money and became enormously rich. They may have furnished his London townhouse in St. James's Square or Moor Park, Hertfordshire, his country seat, the contents of which were left to his elder brother Thomas Anson (ca. 1695–1773), of Shugborough, the family estate.

An inventory of Shugborough in 1842 lists examples in a garden pavilion, known as the Chinese House, built in 1747: "2 Chinese Looking Glasses, 4 small looking Glasses."[57] However, earlier accounts by visitors suggest there were many more glass pictures in the house. In 1763, Phillip Yorke describing his recent visit to Shugborough, noted in the Mansion House "the apartment within is furnished with Chinese taffeta and paper and adorned with the prettiest Chinese paintings I know of in England."[58] A country house tourist, John Parnell, had remarked in 1769, that there were "Indian Pictures & china cases & other Elegant Pices of Chinese workmanship"[59] in the Chinese House and on 23 June 1779, Peter Oliver (n.d.), following a visit to Shugborough, recorded, "the Pictures were not crowded, but were in Taste; many in the Chinese Style, & 2 in particular were painted on thick Glass, finely executed & animated."[60]

The largest and most impressive, are a pair of mirror paintings depicting "Chinese Nobility," identical mirror images of a seated Mandarin and two attendants on a garden terrace, beneath a festoon border of beribboned flowers, within ornate carved and partly gilt Chinese rosewood frames after European designs (fig. 9).[61] Stylistically, and in format, they are similar to a pair at the Rijksmuseum depicting the estates of rich Canton merchants located on the banks of the Pearl River, dated to 1755–1770.[62] A pair matching the description of the Shugborough pair were sold at an auction held by Messrs. Christie and Ansell, in London, on 10 February 1780, highlighted in the *Public Advertiser* as "two superb paintings on Plate Glass of large Dimensions."[63] The sale was held to clear the contents of the store of Robert Carr (1739–1786), captain of

9 *Seated Nobleman with Attendants on a Terrace*, one of a pair, reverse glass painting, Canton, mid-eighteenth century, carved rosewood with gilding, dimensions of mirror 119.4 × 86.3 cm, Shugborough Hall, Staffordshire.

the *Greenwich,* a merchant vessel in the service of the HEIC during the 1770–1771, 1771–1773, and 1776–1777 seasons*,* sailing only as far as Bombay or Madras. Offered individually in the sale catalogue as "A most beautiful high finished Chinese Painting on Plate Glass, buildings, figures, &c., embellished with festoons of flowers, size 34 inches by 47, in a carved and partly gilt frame," they were sold together for £26.5.0 to "Anson."[64] The buyer was perhaps the Admiral's nephew, George Adam Anson (1731–1789), who inherited the estate in 1773. Carr, who appears to have lived large (at his death he had substantial debts of £13,000), may have purchased the framed mirrors second-hand in Bombay or Madras.[65]

Conclusion

As early as the 1740s, elite English consumers were able to acquire Chinese reverse glass painted mirrors. The documentary evidence underscores the agency of the maritime elite in the patronage of these novel luxuries during their peak period of production from 1740 through 1770. As the novelty of their original painted lacquer or carved rosewood frames waned, they were later reframed to integrate with changing fashions. Large overmantel mirrors installed above the chimneypiece became a feature of

high-status bedrooms, when more elaborate assemblages of Chinese painted mirrors were created. With the rise of neoclassicism in the 1760s, European and Cantonese merchants increasingly replaced mirrors with less expensive plain glass, and with greater frequency began to copy European copper-plate engravings as design sources, as the once fine art became commodified.

Offering an alternative "authentic" universe to European rococo chinoiserie, the Chinese artists captured the minutiae of elite Chinese life in exquisite detail, embroidery, hair ornaments, costume and jewelry, rarely observed outside of China, yet with the exception of William Chambers, these realistic portrayals appear to have had little direct impact on European material culture. Chinese painted mirrors were probably as rare in the eighteenth century as they are today. Thierry Audric's corpus and research, the conference in Romont in 2020, and this subsequent publication, have opened up the study of Chinese reverse painted glass mirrors to a new generation of scholars and there is much to be explored: identification of Chinese print sources found in woodblock prints (*Gusu*) from Suzhou; analysis of the ethnic jewelry, costumes, and coiffures; interpretation of the popular dramas or novels inspiring these works of art; and ultimately establishing the various workshops and the anonymous artists that produced them. Whether acquired new, second, or even third hand, in original Chinese frames or refashioned for the British interior, with subjects that appealed to both Chinese and British elites, displayed in private to express one's openness to other global cultures and acquired through powerful commercial networks, it's clear that Chinese reverse painting on English glass is worth looking at, as both a reflection of Asia and of ourselves.

1 Dating of Chinese painted mirrors has traditionally been based on their European frames, however, as the majority have been reframed at least once this method is compromised, and a study of the documentary evidence offers an alternative interpretation.
2 For a discussion of the term "back-painting," the popular eighteenth-century English technique of pasting mezzotints face down on glass, removing the paper, and painting the outlines in oil paints, which has been confused with Chinese reverse glass paintings, see Ferguson 2021.
3 Audric 2020, 161.
4 British Library (BL), London, BL/IOR/E/1/1 ff.371–371v.
5 East India Company 1926, 4.
6 BL/IOR/E/1/10 ff. 484–485v; IOR/E/1/10 ff. 571–572v, and IOR/E/1/18 ff. 108–109v.
7 Victoria and Albert Museum, London, W.36:1 to 3-1934.
8 BL/IOR/G/12/44 f.155, cited in Jourdain 1950, 64.
9 Around 1738–1741, Christen Lintrup (1703–1772), of the DAK, ordered mirror paintings mounted in enamel-on-copper for the Danish royal household, an example is illustrated in Audric 2020, 170–171, no. 14, and discussed in Wirgin 1998, no. 259, and 243; Clemmensen/Mackesprang 1980, 148–158; Bryant 1988, 4; and for agents of the French East India Company acquiring painted mirrors by 1745, see Audric 2020, 160.
10 Van Dyke 2019, 124–125. Taels are a Chinese unit of weight of silver used as a unit of currency.
11 Van Dyke 2011, 111.
12 See the Charles Irvine Papers (CIP), James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

13 Chambers 1757, 14; and for later artists see Conner 2016 and Audric 2020.
14 For another artisan or shop owner, known as Quiqua, active in 1770, see Van Dyke 2019, 126.
15 Ibid, 128.
16 CIP, CIC/1740/44a, cited in Brescius 2016, 215–216.
17 Audric 2020, 44, 278 and 279.
18 Audric 2020, 84.
19 Audric 2020, 90 and 204–205, no. 285.
20 Audric 2020, 90.
21 Brescius 2016, 219, and Cormack 1960, 11.
22 Chambers 1763, 2, cited in Audric 2020, 161.
23 Chambers 1763, 2.
24 Windsor, Royal Archives, 1747: 54545–54553, 54546.
25 On 6 August 1746, two cases of looking glasses were sent to Canton by the HEIC on the *Prince of Wales,* acquired by George Huish (d. 1747), an agent in Portsmouth, British Library (BL), India Office Records (IOR), E/3/109/f. 263.
26 Élie de Beaumont 1895, 144–145, cited in Audric 2020, 161. I thank Audric for his assistance.
27 Élie de Beaumont 1895, 144–145.
28 *General Advertiser*, 9 March 1748, 3.
29 *General Advertiser*, 9 March 1748, 3.
30 *Public Advertiser*, 20 March 1761, 4.
31 See Christie's, London, 1 June 2007, lot 56; Christie's, London, 19 February 1970, lot 53; and Jourdain 1950, figs. 63, 43.
32 Jaffer 2001, 58.
33 The Chinese wallpapers were removed from other rooms in the house in the early twentieth century and reinstalled with the Chinese mirrors in the 1960s.
34 NT872171.1–2, and NT872228.1–6; and De Bruijn 2018, 97.
35 For the latter, see De Bruijn 2018, 125.
36 See examples at Shugborough, NT1270906 and NT 1270824; and Jourdain/Jenyns 1950, 34.
37 Christie's, New York, 14 October 2020, lot 4, the frame is of papier mâché, pulped paper, a technique developed to imitate gilded wood and stone; and Barczewski 2014, 22–23.
38 The popular subject is found on hand-colored woodblock prints made in Suzhou for the domestic market, see Rimaud et al., 230, fig. 10.
39 NT872229.1–5.
40 Jourdain 1950, 38.
41 See for example Nagel, Stuttgart, 8 December 2020, lot 403.
42 Audric 2020, 150 and 228.
43 De Bruijn 2018, 170.
44 NT771801.
45 NT771801 and NT771807.
46 Tomlin 1986, 115.
47 *Public Advertiser*, 3 April 1769, 4.
48 Sharma/Davies 2018.
49 See for example Audric 2020, 190–191, no. 171; and for another version of the *meiren*, see Audric 2020, 188–189, no. 166.
50 Murdoch 2006, fig. 9.
51 Murdoch 2006, 61.
52 In France, a *trumeau* , was a large, complex mirror incorporating painted or sculptural panels
53 Jourdain/Jenyns 1950, 106, fig. 64.
54 Jewell 1819, 24.
55 For a comparable scene, see Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, O-1938.
56 See fn. 31 and NT1270823.1–2, 1270907.1–2, all illustrated in Audric 2020.
57 Staffordshire Records Office, Stafford, D615/EH/12.
58 Godber 1968, 161.
59 Cousins 2015, 39.
60 Cousins 2015, 64.

61 NT1270818.1–2; and Audric 2020, 50–51.
62 Audric 2020, 46–49, nos. 52 and 53.
63 *Public Advertiser*, 10 February 1780, 4.
64 An annotated copy of the sale catalogue is in the Christie's Archive, London.
65 National Archives, Kew, PROB 11/1148/339.

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11

JAPANESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTING
THE OTHER EAST ASIAN TRADITION

Hans Bjarne Thomsen

Abstract

The essay outlines the Japanese tradition of reverse glass painting, looking at both textual evidence as well as extant objects from the three early modern production centers: Nagasaki, Osaka, and Edo. A knowledge transfer from Dutch and Chinese traditions of reverse glass painting initially took place through the city of Nagasaki, where a number of local artists received aspects from both traditions and created a new genre of Japanese art. In time, this art form spread to other parts of Japan, where it took on themes typically seen in Japanese visual media, such as beautiful women, kabuki actors, and landscapes. The inter-medial connections to the woodblock prints became a key part of the Japanese tradition of reverse glass painting and, with the advent of new media in the latter part of the nineteenth century, photography became incorporated into the art form.

Keywords

Japan, intercultural transfer, intermedia transfer, Nagasaki, photography, kabuki

Introduction

Although Chinese reverse glass paintings have been at the forefront of Western-language examination of the non-Western reverse glass painting, this was by no means the only tradition, as evidenced by the essays in this volume.[1] Other traditions appeared across Asia, and in East Asia, Japan stands as a notable example. The following essay will trace the history and development of reverse glass painting in Japan, with an emphasis on textual sources, extant paintings, and their intercultural aspects. The points of connection to other media, such as Japanese woodblock prints, will be examined, both as inspirations for the paintings, as well as how reverse glass paintings came to inspire woodblock print designs. It will be demonstrated that Japanese reverse glass painting became a vibrant Japanese art form that flourished within networks of cross-media interchange and cross-cultural borrowings.

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In the case of Japan, as in other Asian cultures, the techniques of reverse glass painting as well as the first physical objects came from Dutch and Chinese traders. Over the succeeding centuries, Japan developed its own tradition and eventually came to influence the production of reverse glass painting in other countries, such as Indonesia. Despite the arguable importance of the Japanese tradition of reverse glass painting, a genre of which involved notable artists such as Shiba Kōkan 司馬江漢 (1747–1818) and Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎 (1760–1849), examples of the Japanese art form have not been described in Western literature.[2] I hope that the discussions of the multicultural traditions of reverse glass painting in this volume will lead to further research on the neglected local traditions of reverse glass productions across Asia.

In contrast, Japanese reverse glass painting has long been discussed in Japanese sources, where an extensive scholarly literature exists on the topic. Twentieth-century scholars, among whom Uchida Rokurō 内田六郎, Ono Tadashige 小野忠重, and Misumi Sadakichi 三隅貞吉 stand out, provide important scholarship on the topic, especially prior to World War II.[3] After the war, the interest among Japanese scholars has been more sporadic, and publications have mostly appeared in the form of exhibition catalogs illustrating examples from important Japanese collections, such as that of Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art. Such exhibitions have often shown reverse glass paintings in combinations with related art forms, for example, *doro-e* 泥絵[4] paintings and *mingei* 民藝 folk art, or in combination with examples from China and the West.[5]

The Japanese names for the reverse glass paintings reveal their complex cross-cultural background and receptions. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they were called: *gyokuban abura-e* 玉板油絵 (alternatively written 玉盤油絵), *ruri-e* 玻璃絵 (alternately *harie*), or *gakagami* 畫鏡 all taken from Chinese precedents. In addition, they were also called *biidoro-e* ビイドロ絵 from the Portuguese "vidro," or "glass." And *garasu-e* 硝子絵 (nowadays written ガラス絵), borrowing from the Dutch word for "glas."[6] The names were used more or less interchangeably through their history in Japan. Since the war, the tendency has been the *katakana* version of *garasu-e*, namely, ガラス絵.[7]

In early modern Japan, there were three major centers of production: Nagasaki, Edo (later renamed Tokyo), and Osaka. In addition, toward the end of the nineteenth century, some reverse glass paintings were also made in Nagoya.[8] These will be examined in a chronological order. First, let us deal with the introduction of the art form to Japan.

Origins and Early History, Documentary Traces

As with the case of China, the first examples of reverse glass paintings were brought by the Dutch as a tribute to country's rulers.[9] In the year 1663, a mission led by Hendrik Indyk went to the Shogun Tokugawa Ietsuna 徳川家綱 (1641–1680), bringing the following gifts:

- Dutch oil paintings, large and small – 21 pieces (阿蘭陀絵大小　二十一枚)
- Animal book by Johnston – 1 book (ヨンストン動物書　一冊)[10]

- Artificial flowers – 2 pieces (作花　二折)
- Glass paintings – 50 pieces (ビイドロ絵板　五十枚)
- Sand clock – 1 piece (砂時計　一個)[11]

Following this initial point of contact, limited to a smaller number of persons in the inner court of the Shogunate, Dutch, and later Chinese, traders brought reverse glass paintings to Japan via the trading port of Nagasaki, where the two groups of foreign traders were allowed to set up trading posts with separate harbors. In due time, likely during the latter half of the eighteenth century, local production ensued.[12]
And it was logical for the Japanese production to take place in Nagasaki, which became a veritable melting pot of cultures, with Chinese, Dutch, and Japanese inhabitants. It was foremost a trading city where many foreign objects entered the country.[13] It was also a place for education and pioneering studies in languages, arts, and medical studies through close contact with foreigners.[14] Lastly, it was also a manufacturing center with many artists and artisans active in multiple media: lacquer, glass, porcelain, woodblock prints, and so on—creating objects destined for foreign and domestic markets.[15] There was also a glass workshop in Nagasaki, the Tamaya 玉屋, often mentioned in the texts left by the Dutch traders.[16]
The first documentary mention of a domestically produced reverse glass paintings comes from a note, written in the seventh month of 1779:

> a local Nagasaki merchant tried to bring four Japanese-made glass paintings to the Dutch traders in Dejima. When searched by the guard Kamoike Aizō, one of the four was found to be an erotic painting.[17]

In other words, by this time, local artists were making reverse glass paintings for Dutch inhabitants of Dejima, likely painted on imported glass. This is followed by the written records of the painter Shiba Kōkan on his visit to Dejima in the tenth month of 1788, recalled in a text written fifteen years later:

> the [Dutch] captain showed me into the room. In a room the size of twenty tatami mats, glass paintings in square frames were lined up on the wall below the supraporte. Below these, chairs were lined up.[18]

This note is accompanied by a figure of the room, which includes numerous images in frames and a glass chandelier. He continues his narrative with an episode on his way back to Edo, when on his return from Dejima, he stopped at the place of his friend in Okayama:

> Tenmei 9 [1789], the ninth day of the second month, a rainy day. I drew a wax painting on a sheet of glass. The connoisseur Suikizaemon could not believe his eyes and declared it to be like a godlike act.[19]

The above record shows that the artist had been taught the techniques of drawing on glass, likely during his sojourn in Nagasaki. It also demonstrates access to sheets of glass and other equipment. In fact, Shiba Kōkan writes in the same text that he taught the techniques of making sheets of glass to manufacturers of glass in Nagasaki, Osaka, and Kyoto during the same trip.[20]

This is an important development, as the Japanese did not make glass sheets at this time, a prerequisite for the creation of reverse glass paintings. In fact, the early Europeans residents in Dejima commented on the lack of sheet glass and windows in their writings. For example, Carl Peter Thunberg writes of his stay in Japan during 1770–1779:

> [the Japanese] ... are likewise acquainted with the art of making glass and can manufacture it for any purpose, both colored and uncolored. But window glass, which is flat, they could not formulate formerly. This art they have lately learned from the Europeans... . There are no glass windows here [in Japanese homes], nor have I observed Mother-of-pearl or Muscovy talk used for this purpose.[21]

For although the Japanese were making glass objects since the eighth century (Nara period), the production did not include sheets of glass. With the arrival of Europeans and the display of glass windows in the Dejima buildings,[22] demand rose for sheet glass, and the Dutch merchants were repeatedly asked to provide glass sheets, as can be seen from their records. For example, a series of records from two years (1786–1787) describes:

> The Governor, through Kosaku, asks for three white glass panes and receives one large and various small panes. (14 February 1785)
> The Governor, through Kosaku, again asks for glass panes. (18 August 1785)
> The Governor, through the son of Kosaku, this time requests and receives two large glass panes, 2 *waaiers* long and 1.5 wide. (June 1786)
> The Governor, through Kosaku's son, receives panes of glass (23 December 1786).[23]

In a way, it is not surprising that Shiba Kōkan should be applying himself to the new techniques, as he was one of the first domestic artists to create copperplate etchings, a technique he based on the information in imported Dutch textbooks.[24] Yet it begs the question of the source of his knowledge of reverse glass painting: possibly he was taught by one of the Dutch traders in Dejima or from reading Dutch textbooks on painting techniques, or through close observation of actual paintings.

The same attention to objects brought in by the Dutch can be seen in an 1800 publication, *Records of Things Seen and Heard in Nagasaki*.[25] Across several pages, a "surgeon's box" is carefully illustrated, including detailed images of the reverse glass details, which are labeled:

> This object is made of brass, reinforced with lead. The central part is made of glass. Below the glass paintings are Dutch characters, also written on glass.[26]

The idea of combining reverse glass painting with furniture and other three-dimensional objects, as seen in this object, became a widespread phenomenon in Japan as well, where such paintings were combined with boxes, lacquer bowls, netsuke, ceramic bowls, and a variety of other media, as will be seen below. At around this time, we can also see from the documentary records in Nagasaki that various local artists started to make their names as producers of reverse glass painting.

A key reference exists by Katsushika Hokusai within his drawing manual *Illustrated Book: The Essence of Coloring* (*Ehon saishiku tsū* 絵本彩色通) from 1848.[27] In this woodblock-printed book, Hokusai closely describes the process of creating a reverse glass painting:

- Colors are applied to the back side of glass paintings. First one draws a sketch from the front side [to serve as a guide]. Then one applies the shading from the back side.
- Then one paints the ground colors. Following this, the details of the patterns [and other details] are "drawn" with a bamboo toothpick. Finally, the background pigments are applied, paying careful attention to the pigments already on the glass.
- If one does not add burnt alum to all pigments, then they will just slip off the smooth surfaces.[28]

The careful and accurate description of the process indicates that Hokusai not only knew the process of creating reverse glass paintings, he likely also took part in their production. In fact, he also designed woodblock prints with reverse glass paintings as key parts of his design.[29]

Origins and Early History, Local Traditions

The tradition of the reverse glass paintings in Japan was located in a limited number of locations, mostly Nagasaki, Osaka, and Edo (later Tokyo). While Nagasaki objects were luxurious and few and created mostly on imported glass sheets from the late eighteenth century to mid-nineteenth century, the Osaka and Edo examples were large-scale productions of reverse glass paintings of greater variety created on domestic glass from the early nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century.

As mentioned above, the history of reverse glass painting in Japan starts in Nagasaki, due to the proximity to foreigners and their product. Examples from both Europe and Chinese seem to have been available as model objects and presumably the techniques of reverse glass painting were also received from the foreigners, whether via word or texts. It is therefore not surprising that the first extant example from the eighteenth century depicts foreigners, specifically Dutch men and women in exterior and interior scenes.

A particularly striking example from the Hamamatsu Municipal Museum or Art may serve as an example (fig. 1). A central panel describes a Dutch couple and servants in a garden setting. Striking aspects of the work includes the elaborate Western-inspired gilt wooden frame as well as the intricately cut and painted glass side panels. This is clearly a luxury product, a feature that distinguishes the early Nagasaki production, with their imported glass and finely painted images, created with gold and other costly pigments. They were made as exotica, with an emphasis on foreign, non-Japanese elements. The intent seems to have been to create a Western impact—the Western aspects were not suppressed, but instead accentuated as their selling point.[30]

As described by Misumi Sadakichi, there is good reason to attribute this work to Araki Jogen 荒木如元 (1765–1824), since this and several other reverse glass paintings closely resemble paintings on paper by the artist.[31] In fact, a number of key Nagasaki painters are recorded as having created reverse glass paintings. Of Ishizaki Yūshi 石崎融思 (1767–1846) it is recorded that: "He learned the technique of foreign painting techniques from his father Genyū [Araki Genyū 荒木元融 (1728–1794)] and created oil painting on the back of glass, in addition, he learned from westerners the technique of adding mercury to the back of glass for making mirrored surfaces."[32] As for the above-

1 Araki Jogen (1765–1824), attr., *Image of Strolling Dutch Men and Women* 和蘭人男女逍遙図, around 1800, reverse glass painting, 66 × 50 cm, Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, Gd0046.

mentioned Jogen, records state that he "was able to sneakily gather the techniques of glass painting from Yūshi and learned how to create Western paintings."[33] In other words, there is a variety of documentary evidence for the early production of reverse glass painting by known Nagasaki artists.

A number of such reverse glass paintings exist, but unlike later paintings created in other locations, they were not mass-produced, but created one by one as luxury objects, perhaps as presents from Nagasaki officials to higher levels of Japanese society—according to the early modern tradition of gift giving from the various domains to the *shogunate, daimyo*, and other powerful persons in the central government.[34]

An intriguing object with connections to contemporary events can be seen in fig. 2. Here, a ship flying Russian flags is approached by smaller boats carrying the Dutch flag. We might ask ourselves, what is a Russian boat doing in the Nagasaki harbor when the port was closed to any other foreign ships than those from Holland and China? On closer examination, it becomes clear that this refers to a specific historical event. In the summer of 1804, the Russian vessel *Nadezhda* arrived on the shores of Japan as a diplomatic mission led by Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov (1764–1807), in an ultimately futile attempt to open the Japan market to Russian trade. After six months of Dutch-mediated discussions, the Japanese government asked the Russian ship to leave the port.[35]

2 Anonymous, *Russian Boat and Dutch Cutters* ロシア船とオランダのカッター, 1804, reverse glass painting, 45×56 cm, Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, Gd0055.

Upon comparing the painting with other images of the ship *Nadezhda*, the similarity is striking.[36] In other words, images on the reverse glass painting created in Nagasaki were not just of idealized scenes of nature or foreigners; they could also include actual historical events.

The reverse glass paintings were not only intended to be hung on walls; other formats were also created, such as the peep box seen in fig. 3.[37] This ingenious construction includes panels inside painted glass and painted wood. Through the glass lens at the top, a landscape painting, placed at the bottom of the box, could be seen, as if through a distant telescope. The drawer at the bottom was designed to contain a variety of landscape paintings.

It would be a mistake, however, to attribute all influence to Western sources. In fact, a number of glass paintings at the time show clear receptions from Chinese visual culture, such as fig. 4, showing a golden pheasant against flowering peony blossoms in the tradition of Chinese bird-and-flower paintings. Here, too, we see touches of luxury with the outlines of the bird done in gold pigments. Befitting the multicultural city of Nagasaki, the visual connections point toward the Dutch as well as the Chinese.

Summing up the characteristics of the early reverse glass paintings made in Nagasaki, we may say that they were images of foreigners and their ships, and that they were

3 Araki Jogen (1765–1824), attr., *Peep Show with Reverse Glass Panels Featuring Western Men and Women* 紅毛男女のガラス絵をはめた覗眼鏡, around 1800, reverse glass paintings and paintings on wood and paper, peep box with glass lens and drawer, 33×28 cm, Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, Gk0006.

4 Anonymous, *Peonies and Golden Pheasant* 牡丹と錦鶏鳥, early nineteenth century, reverse glass painting, 30×36 cm, Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, Gd0069.

5 Totoya Hokkei (1780–1850), *Foreign Goods from the Hikita Shop in Osaka* 大阪疋田唐物 from the series *The Three Cities* 三都之内, early 1820s, woodblock print (*surimono*), ink and color on paper *shikishiban*, 19.8 × 17.7 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Horatio Greenough Curtis, 37.337.

made on fine, in imported glass, with fine details and expensive pigments including the use of gold and elaborate frames. In other words, they were objects of luxury, and not of mass production.

During the early nineteenth century, the development moved to two centers in central Japan, namely, Edo and Osaka. No longer were images of Dutch foreigners or Chinese-inspired birds and flowers the main themes, but, instead, images of beautiful Japanese women, kabuki theater actors, and landscapes came to predominate.

Early modern production of glass objects started in earnest in Nagasaki, from where a Kume Seibei 久米清兵衛 traveled to Osaka and established a shop Harimaya 播磨屋 in Osaka in Tenman Tenjinja-mae天満天神社前in 1751, where he produced his own glass works. Glass objects, mostly lamps, toys, and other decorative objects, produced by Kume were then sold in Edo by Kagaya Kyūbei 加賀屋久兵衛, who set up his own glass-producing workshop. Later, Kazusaya Ryūsaburō 上総屋留三郎 (1821–1893) also set up a shop in Edo where he sold imported objects, along with domestic objects from Nagasaki and Osaka. We may get an intimation of what was sold in such a shop from a *surimono* print by Totoya Hokkei 魚屋北渓 (1780–1850), entitled *From the Three Cities: Hikiya Karamono Shop* 三都之内 大阪疋田唐物 (fig. 5), where we see exotic ob-

6 Follower of Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Cat and Woman by Brazier* 猫と火鉢に寄る女, mid-nineteenth century, reverse glass painting, 24×35 cm, Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, Gd0084.

jects for sale, such as peacock feathers, mechanical fountains, and a reverse glass painting of a Western woman.[38]

It stands to reason that the production of reverse glass paintings followed soon after. We know of some Edo practitioners of the genre, such as Shiba Kōkan and likely Hokusai, but almost all of these objects remain anonymous.

Many of the paintings produced in Osaka and Edo bear close connections to the Japanese woodblock print traditions, with the similar compositions, names of the actors and courtesans, titles, and even series. At the same time, there was also a certain degree of simplification when compared with prints, as seals of censors and publishers were missing, as were print techniques such as *bokashi* (gradation) and *karazuri* (blind printing), due to the natural restrictions of the medium.

Fig. 6 depicts a beautiful woman next to *naga-hibachi* brazier, smiling at her pet cat in the process of cleaning itself.[39] Following the traditions of *bijinga*, prints of beautiful people, some lines (such as the red outlines of hands, arms, and face) are quite delicately drawn, with interesting brush effects at her hairline, and the fascination with textiles is fully evident. As in woodblock prints, large portions of the composition are given to layers of different textile patterns, depicted flat on the surface.

7 Anonymous, *Ichikawa Sadanji and Onoe Kikugorō Playing the Parts of Benkei and Ushiwakamaru* 弁慶と牛若丸に扮する市川左団次と尾上菊五郎, 1890, reverse glass painting, 61 × 31.4 cm, Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, Gd0153.

Kabuki actor images also became popular, and not only in single images, but also in sets of two and three paintings, mirroring the diptychs and triptychs of actor woodblock prints. Fig. 7 is a good case in point: a pair of paintings depicting the battle on Sanjō Bridge between Benkei and Yoshitsune. The paintings also depict the names of the actors who play these roles, and by looking at the combination of actors and roles, it is possible to deduce exact information, including date, actor identities, and the name of the play.[40] In this case, as with the Russian ship, the subject matter was of contemporary relevance.

One of the more elaborate and unusual object types created in Osaka as well as in Edo/Tokyo are the landscapes (fig. 8). Here, too, there are points of connection with the contemporary print culture, with titles such as "famous views of," "eight views of," "Tōkaidō stations of," and so on. The emphasis is on travel rather than static views, and the paintings are often peopled with detailed figures that under closer inspection turn out to be tiny cutout photographs, pasted on the inside of the glass. It is easy to imagine how the medium of photography that enjoyed great popularity at the time would have added to the interest and salability of these reverse glass paintings. In addition, an unusual range of painting styles are used to creating striking contrasts within the

8 Anonymous, *Combined Eight Views of Ōmi* 近江八景一覧, late nineteenth century, reverse glass painting, 75 × 50 cm, Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, Gd0079.

paintings: between the photographs, the painfully exact architecture of the buildings, and the roughly brushed details of the landscape, such as trees and hills. Some details are added after the pigments had dried, for example, a sharp tool was used to scratch lines within the tree trunks in order to add texture. Another unusual aspect is the thinly sliced mother-of-pearl used mostly to enhance architectural features. As a result, the landscape becomes a striking study of contrasts between media and styles. On some landscapes, such as the present painting, layers of differently painted glass are placed on top of each other, giving a distinct three-dimensional effect.

Although woodblock prints and reverse glass paintings share many points in common, there were also significant differences. On the one hand, prints allowed greater detail and thus more information to be incorporated into the images, in addition, accuracy of lines and colors were greater with prints. On the other hand, reverse glass paintings were more durable and did not fade when exposed to light. In this way, the paintings could be used for more than a season.

For the reasons of durability, the reverse-glass-painted medium gained functions not available to woodblock prints: for example as votive plates to place under the eaves of shrines where they were exposed to intemperate weather, or, as we see in (fig. 9), as shop signs that remained bright and attractive, despite exposure to the elements. The above shop sign for the cosmetic Komachisui 小町水[41] in the Osaka store Kawashita

9 Anonymous, *Shop Sign for Komachisui with Reverse Glass Painted Panels* 硝子絵をはめた小町水看板, late nineteenth century, wood, pigments, and lacquer with reverse glass painted panels, Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, Gk0013.

Chōyōdō 川下朝陽堂, features a multimedia display: painted details, two reverse glass panels, carved calligraphy, and seals highlighted with red and gold, with black lacquer base on a metal-reinforced wood base. The durability of the colors in the glass paintings made them ideal participants in such multimedia shop signs.[42] Over time, reverse glass paintings came to be used as box covers and incorporated into porcelain cups or lacquer trays.[43]

As for the Edo artists who participated in their design, we know of a few, for example, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, and his students Ochiai Yoshiiku 落合芳幾 (1833–1904).[44] But not only did artists participate in the creation of reverse glass paintings, they also incorporated them into woodblock print designs. This was most often seen in *surimono*, long the place for displaying still lifes of exotic and luxurious objects. In addition to the *surimono* print seen in fig. 5, we have prints by Suzuki Gako 鈴木鷺湖, Hokkei, and others.[45]

Domestic vs. Foreign

In contrast to Chinese reverse glass paintings that were often made in response to the orders of foreigners and exported in large numbers, very few Japanese examples created in the early modern era were sent out of Japan. The examples that can be

10 Utagawa Sadahide (1807–1873), *A Yokohama Shop for Imported Goods* 横浜唐物店の図 from the series *Pictures of Merchandise for Sale at Yokohama* 横浜売り物図会の内, 1860, woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 36.5×25.4 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 11.39178.

found in Western collections were typically those brought back by collectors who had lived a long time in Japan, such as the examples collected by Franz von Siebold in the Five Continents Museum of Munich.[46]

That the intended audiences were mainly Japanese can also be seen in the Japanese inscriptions that often appear on the paintings, or the typically Japanese formats such as shop broadbills, and even in Japanese topics such as kabuki actors. In time, they also became products sold in Yokohama, as can be seen in this woodblock prints by Gountei Sadahide 五雲亭貞秀 (1807–1878/79) who describes reverse glass painting as one of the exotic products that can be bought in Yokohama (fig. 10).[47] The image on the right, which is clearly labeled "reverse glass painting" 玉板油絵, is a bird red macaw (Ara tricolor) in a bird-and-flower design. The painting could even have been intended to describe an import from China, along with the other objects, in this case, "a colored copper-plate engraving" 銅板絵彩色 with an image of a Western mother and child, in an elaborate Western-style frame.

During the mid-nineteenth century, another merchant, Kagaya Kyūbei 加賀屋久兵衛, described above as one of the first merchants to produce and sell glass objects in Edo, began to advertise himself as a "Specialist in Dutch, Chinese, and Japanese Glass Objects." A woodblock printed broadsheet advertisement circulated by the store from

the mid-nineteenth century features dozens of different glass objects made and sold at the store, and, if one looks closely, one can also detect reverse glass paintings of the landscape type among the great variety of available glass objects.[48]

With the opening up of trade from Japan across East and Southeast Asia in the early twentieth century, foreign markets for Japanese reverse glass paintings started to appear. Notable there was Indonesia, or Dutch East Indies, to where a trade was established and many extant objects currently exist, especially the Japanese landscape models, of a type that were mostly free of Japanese cultural meanings.[49] Yet, excepts for such isolated cases, Japanese reverse glass paintings mostly remain in Japan and for this reason have gathered little attention on the world stage.

1 The author thanks the director and staff of the Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, including Masui Atsuko 増井敦子, Uchiyama Chie 内山智恵, Shimaguchi Naoya 島口直弥, and others for their invaluable help in granting me access to the paintings in their collection. Likewise, he thanks the various owners of reverse glass paintings, including Tetsu Hirasawa 平澤哲 and anonymous collectors.

2 To the best of my knowledge, this article represents the first discussion of this Japanese art form in a Western language. The study of Japanese glass manufacture has likewise been neglected, except for its modern manifestations. For the latter, see: National Museum of Modern Art 1982, Glasmuseum Frauenau 2017, and Aoki et al. 2007.

3 With over a dozen books and articles on the subject, Uchida Rokurō 内田六郎 (1892–1974) reigns as the main scholarly source on the genre. A medical doctor, he was also a major collector of reverse glass painting, a collection which he donated to the Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art, where he also served as the director.

4 *Doro-e* paintings were produced with a type of thick, opaque paint; the white pigment was ground up seashells mixed with water. They became popular with artists in the late eighteenth century and typically depicted landscapes, often in extreme one-point perspectives. See Ōta Kinen Bijutsukan, 1984.

5 As an example of a publication including Western and Chinese reverse glass painting, see Shōtō Bijutsukan 1984; for a publication that included *doro-e*: Ono 1990; for an example treating Japanese reverse glass painting as folk art, see Suntory Art Museum 1978; and as examples of sales catalogs, see Yanagiya 1927 and Onotsuka 1975.

6 *Giyaman* ギヤマン (from the Dutch *diamant*) was also used to describe objects made of glass.

7 The various nomenclature and their differences is discussed in: Uchida 1942, 3–5.

8 The Nagoya examples are notable for their prominent seals of the producer, Kōbundō 耕文堂, and for the subject matter of war, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Due to lack of space, the Nagoya paintings will not be discussed in this article.

9 For examples of the Dutch use of reverse glass paintin as diplomatic gifts to the Chinese and other courts, see other essays in this volume. For example, the Dutch gave reverse glass paintings to the Siam King Phra Narai in 1686. The author thanks Jessica Patterson for providing this information.

10 Jan Jonston (1603–1675) was a Polish scholar and physician who wrote a series of illustrated books on the natural world *Historiae naturalis* in the 1650s. His publication arrived in Japan at several points and came to influence the visual culture of Japan in significant ways during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mostly through its figures designed by the Swiss artist Matthäus Merian (1593–1650).

11 Noted in the Shogunate's records of foreign relations, the *Tsūkō ichiran* 通航一覧 (An Overview of Contacts by Sea), vol. 242, 1663. For a discussion of this record, see Uchida 1942, 16–17. While documents survive of this apparently first introduction of reverse glass painting to Japanese audiences, the objects do not survive.

12 For a comprehensive study of this knowledge transfer between the West and Japan, see Sasaki 1979.

13 Due to its status as one of the four ports of Japan and as the only one open to Westerners.

14 For example, in the medical arts Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716), Carl Peter Thunberg (1743–1828), and Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866) came to influence Japanese medical science.

15 This included the media of woodblock prints, Nagasaki lacquers, glass production, and, above all, ceramic production in Arita.

16 The Dejima *Dagregister* records, for example, visits to the Tamaya by the Dutch on 20 June 1775 and 8 July 1776. Another record notes that thunder killed a man and hurt four others at the glass works on 17 August 1790. Blussé et al. 2004, 388 and 397.

17 「安永八己亥年七月晦日、ある細物屋が日本細工の硝子絵四枚を出島に持入れた事があった。其際出島に詰めていた番人の鴨池愛蔵がそのビイド口絵を検査して見ると一枚は春画のビイド口絵出会った云々」 Noted in Koga 1944.

18 「夫より甲比丹部屋へ行く。畳二十畳も敷き、四方ランマ下にビイド口に描きたる額を掛け並べ、下には椅子を並べ…」 See Shiba 1927, 101. The room is illustrated by Kōkan in: Shiba 1803, vol. 3, 17. Other records of Dutch reverse glass painting on Dejima include those of Chūryō Satō (1762–1848), who writes that during his visit in 1797 that he was shown a portrait of the Dutch captain's wife, a picture of "two inches square in which was painting that truly looked alive … painted in colors with oil pigments on the back of glass."「其畫ハ二寸四方の鏡内に畫したる眞に生るが如し…火済にして裏より荏油にて彩寫す」 See Satō 1929, vol. 2.

19 「天明九年二月九日、雨、蝋画をビイド口に認める。悴喜左衛門は、好事にして吾を信ずること神の如し」 See Shiba 1927, 169.

20 Shiba Kōkan (1815), described in Uchida 1942, 18–19

21 Screech 2011, 220 and 250. Based on the original German text: Thunberg 1792–94.

22 "[Describing the buildings on Dejima] some people have of late brought with them from Batavia either a few small windows or else some panes of glass, in order to throw more light into the rooms and to enjoy the view of external objects." Screech 2011, 94.

23 Blussé et al. 2004, 503, 512, 528, and 535.

24 See French, 1974.

25 Hirokawa 1800.

26 「此像の金物はりう金にて造るちやノつがんの金物ハ鉛之中画のある所ハびいどろ画のある下の所をびいどろに阿蘭陀文字ある」 The author gratefully acknowledges the help from Jessica Patterson, who pointed out that similar objects were made in China for export during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, it is entirely likely that this particular "Dutch surgeon's box" was made in China.

27 Hokusai 1848. A copy is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (acc nr. 2013.881).

28 「○ 硝子へハ裏より彩色をする事表より素画して裏よりまず隈を先へとるべし○ 夫より地塗をし模様ハ竹の楊枝にてかくそのうへをバ絵の具にしたがひて外の絵のぐを塗べし○ 惣ての絵のぐの中焼明礬を入るる然なければつるつるおつるん」. Hokusai 1848.

29 For example, a small *surimono* print (13.1 × 8.9 cm) from 1804 of a woman clipping her nails.

30 The exotic element is repeated in paintings and in the woodblock prints created in Nagasaki. It seems to have been expected of Nagasaki products created for the domestic market, that they depicted foreigners and their customs. See Ono 1990, 37–44.

31 Misumi 1959, 11–18.

32 「又蛮画の法を父元 融に受け、硝子裏より油絵を写照す。又硝子に水銀を着け、絵鏡の法を蛮人に受け」 See Koga 1983. Appeared originally in Shun 1804.

33 「融思の硝子画法偸み学び、専ら蛮画を巧にす。」 Kaga 1983, 166. Appeared originally in Shun (1804).

34 Chaiklin 2017.

35 Matthews 2013, 200–201.

36 The ship had a vivid life. First built in England as a slave ship in 1799, it was captured by the French and then regained by the British. Then the ship was then sold to Russia and sailed around the world, finally it was chartered by an American company, then captured by Danes and destroyed by ice floes in 1808.

37 Uchida attributes this work to the Nagasaki painter Araki Jogen 荒木如元. The box was in the collection of the Kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjūrō VII 市川團十郎七代目 (1791–1859). Uchida 1971, ill. 64.

38 Held in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Another impression with color variations can be found in the Kobe City Museum; both *surimono* prints were published by Shizandō 芝山堂版. The *Settsu meisho zue* 摂津名所図会 features a storefront image of the Hikida store 疋田屋店頭図, complete with exotic imported objects form the Dutch and the Chinese. See Akisato 1796–1798, vol 4 (*jō* 上), 36.

39 Ono and Uchida suggest that this painting was done by a follower of Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳 (1798–1861), an artist known for his predilections for cats. Cf. Ono 1990, 146, and Uchida 1971, ill. 88. Uchida writes that reverse glass paintings with flesh-colored outlines for hands and face—such as the present work—tend to be older than those made with black outlines. Cf. Uchida 1977, 31.

40 They are Ichikawa Sadanji I 市川左團次初代 (1842–1904), playing Musashibō Benkei 武蔵坊弁慶 (left) and Onoe Kikugorō V 尾上菊五郎五代目 (1844–1903), playing Ushiwakamaru 牛若丸 (right) in the play *Shigemori Kangen Hashi Benkei* 重盛諫言橋弁慶that was planned to be performed in September 1890 at the Shin-Tomiza Theater 新富座 in Tokyo. For unknown reasons, however, the performance was cancelled, but not before a number of woodblock prints (and this pair of reverse glass paintings) had been created. See Ihara 1962, vol. 7, 370.

41 A well-known cosmetic, developed in 1877 by the cosmetics company Gakuyōdō 岳陽堂 located in Bakurōchō, Tokyo. The name even entered into the dialogue of contemporary Kabuki plays.

42 Ono illustrates an unusual Edo-period shop sign for a barber. See: Ono 1954, ill. 112.

43 A number of types from the nineteenth century can be seen in Shūkan Ginka 1977, 5–19.

44 For Kuniyoshi see: Iwakiri 2011, ills. 157, 158, and 420. In addition, Kuniyoshi's remarkable designs in the 1851–1852 novel *Nanatsugumi irekomakura* 七組入子枕 by Senka Ryūtei 笠亭仙果 (1837–1884). As for Utagawa Yoshiiku, see his *mōko no shashin* 猛虎之写真 print and his *Shashin kagami* 写真鏡 print series.

45 Suzuki Gako 鈴木鷺湖 (1816–1870), *Chinese Artist Painting a Plum Branch on a Glass Panel*, ca 1840 (Yale University Art Gallery, acc nr ILE2017.30.80). A series of six *surimono* prints with the title *Series of Six Birds and Flowers on Glass* 花鳥玉盤六枚の内 is an interesting case in point. All depict reverse glass paintings and were composed by apparently different artists, including Hokkei. The other artists (Mibun 未分, Hakuto 白兎, Sessō 雪叟, etc) are all unidentified, but Uchida suggests that they were all names used by Hokkei. See Uchida 1971, supp. nos. 1–4.

46 Accession numbers S179a, S179b, S680a, and S680b. The author thanks Bruno Richtsfeld for his help in showing these objects.

47 Also known as Utagawa Sadahide 歌川貞秀. Another print by Sadahide with the same time also depicts a reverse glass painting. In addition, he also created an untitled print with a reverse glass painting next to a newly imported violin. All three prints are dated 1860. See Uchida 1971, supp. nos. 6 and 8.

48 A later example dated 1863 can be found in the collection of Kobe City Museum. According to the museum, the original edition dates to 1849–1854 and two versions of the original prints exist. See also descriptions in: Tanahashi 1981; Suntory Museum of Art 2010; and Kobe City Museum 2011.

49 Thanks to Jérôme Saumuel for pointing this out. The pioneering research on reverse glass paintings in Indonesia was conducted by Sasaki 1984, 5–15. Refer also to his ground-breaking survey reports on Indonesian glass paintings: Sasaki 1987.

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12

"IN ALL OF BEIJING, THERE ARE NO MORE THAN FOUR PAINTINGS ON GLASS THAT WOULD FALL WITHIN OUR CONSIDERATION"

CHINESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS FROM CZECH COLLECTIONS AND THEIR CONTEXTS

Michaela Pejčochová

Abstract

Chinese reverse glass paintings were sought after during the 1920s and 1930s by European dealers who operated in Beijing and other cities. Through exhibitions of Chinese art, they reached a number of European collectors and became a sensation among the wealthy, who decorated their homes with them. The collectors were not only the nouveaux riches, but also prominent artists of the period, who otherwise maintained strict stylistic and theoretic criteria for their own works. This paper presents the little-studied Chinese reverse glass paintings that survive in Czech collections. It discusses their origin, means of their acquisition, contexts of their original reception, as well as their acquired meanings once brought to Europe by their new owners. It looks specifically at the attention given to these artworks by Czech avant-garde artists, who collected them as part of their interest in "primitive art" and made them a source of inspiration for their own creations.

Keywords

Chinese reverse glass paintings in Czech collections, Chinese art collection at the National Gallery Prague, collecting Chinese reverse glass paintings in the West, Vojtěch Chytil (1896–1936), Josef Martínek (1888–1976), European modernism and Chinese reverse glass painting

Introduction

In Central Europe, much as in other parts of the European continent, collecting Asian art was a favorite pastime of the nobility since the times of the Emperor Rudolf II Habsburg (r. 1576–1612).[1] Collections of Chinese and Japanese porcelain were part of the cabinets of curiosities in noble mansions around baroque Bohemia and Moravia, and Japanese lacquer became a welcome novelty slightly later.[2] Similarly, Asian reverse glass paintings were included in the collections of Asian objects in the Central-European region (historically designated as the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, i.e., Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, most of which today constitute the Czech Republic), albeit slightly later than in Western Europe.

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Although some of the reverse glass paintings might have featured in the local aristocratic collections and are now lost, the earliest ones preserved to this day were collected toward the end of the nineteenth century by a new type of collectors. These were the newly emerging Orientalists, who specialized in the study of Asian languages, philosophy, and material culture, as well as the nouveaux riches—collectors from industrial and entrepreneurial circles who did their best to catch up with aristocratic collecting of the previous decades. The latter even bought some of the chateaus and palaces from their previous owners or built luxurious villas with lavish interior decoration, where the reverse glass paintings had their place alongside an array of Chinese decorative objects.

The reverse glass paintings extant in Czech collections at the moment, however, mostly originate from a still later collecting period. During the 1920s and 1930s, travelers and adventurers set off to Asia and brought back artworks and objects of material culture that included Chinese and Japanese paintings, sculptures, objects of ancient art, and a number of applied art and handicraft objects, including reverse painting on glass. The National Gallery Prague (NGP) collects eight Chinese reverse glass paintings, whose origins can be traced to several of these interwar period sources.

The present essay will discuss in detail the context of the acquisition of these reverse glass paintings, the situation of their original owners, and the role they played in the collecting of Asian art in the period in question. It will elaborate on the remarkable phenomenon of Chinese reverse glass painting as a sensation among modernist artists, who chose to place them alongside African, Chinese, Tibetan, and Japanese sculpture and a number of other non-European art and curio objects in order to decorate their residences. Some even became inspiration for their own creations. So far, Chinese reverse glass painting in Czech collections has been very little studied, and there has been even less study regarding the history and the contexts of their collecting. This essay hopes to provide the preliminary outline of their typology, function, and mainly the framework for understanding their reception and appreciation during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Collecting Chinese Reverse Glass Painting in the Early Twentieth Century: Orientalists and Industrialists

The earliest extant reverse glass painting in a Czech collection was owned by Rudolf Dvořák (1860–1920), the first professor of Oriental Studies at the Charles University in Prague and the founder of Chinese Studies in the interwar Czechoslovakia.[3] The painting is presently housed at the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African, and American Cultures, which is part of the Czech National Museum, and was most probably acquired from one of the local curio shops at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[4] This painting in its original Chinese frame likely depicts a scene from a popular novel or an event from the biography of a legendary Chinese official (fig. 1). The figures of eight gentlemen and an attending lady, situated in an open veranda with a view of the

1 *Meeting of Dignitaries in Court Dress on a Terrace*, China, reverse painting on glass, 74×54 cm, National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, 18418.

surrounding garden, are dressed in colorfully depicted official robes, both civil and military. The opulent decorativeness, which can also be seen in the furniture, textiles, and vegetation around the hall was no doubt the primary incentive for the acquisition of such a painting by an early twentieth-century scholar who had an avid interest in Asian art. The colorful execution, with a range of typical details, represented the purported image of the Chinese people and their activities in the popular imagination of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and was likewise favored by early collectors with ethnographic interests in Asian cultures.

During the same period, Chinese reverse glass paintings were also collected by rich entrepreneurs who profited from the industrial boom in Central Europe. Among these were the founders of one of the first large department stores, Max Breda (1863–1914) and David Weinstein (1874–1939), who started the Breda & Weinstein company in the northeastern metropolis of Opava. They invited the architect Leopold Bauer (1872–1938) from Vienna to build a department store inspired by American modern architecture, which was, with its eight floors and a ground plan of 1,500 square meters, the biggest shopping mall in interwar period Czechoslovakia. Sadly, the Breda and Weinstein families had to flee upon the takeover of the region by the Nazis in 1938 and their properties were confiscated. Among the possessions of Max Breda's son Pavel and his wife Ilona that were seized from their flat in Opava were books with rare engravings

and "Chinese paintings on glass."[5] These objects were unfortunately not found during postwar attempts to restore their legitimate ownership by tracking down objects lost during wartime looting. The presence of the Chinese reverse glass paintings in the household of a rich industrialist, however, shows that collecting strategy was yet another way in which the wealthy businessmen of the interwar era took inspiration from aristocratic and artistic circles. Similar situations are also documented in other European countries. We can find, for example, a casual literary note referring to the Garsington Manor in Oxford where "the scarlet drawing-room glowed with Chinese paintings on glass."[6] The house was a luxurious home of Lady Ottoline Morell (1873–1938), known as a rich and influential celebrity of the artistic and intellectual circles of her day. It can be assumed that many more apartments, villas, and manors of the day were decorated in this way, both in Great Britain and on the European continent, some of which only survive in photographs and written descriptions.

Three Paintings with Unknown Origins: A Couple in Official Dress and a Monastery in Southern China

The Chinese reverse glass paintings in the NGP collection can be roughly divided into three groups, each with a different origin and original collecting contexts. Firstly, there are three paintings of an unknown origin, which include a *Military Officer in Formal Attire* and a *Lady in Formal Attire*, obviously a pair that most likely came to Europe together (fig. 2). They are of the type often seen in the chateau and castle collections in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, representing a curious and peculiar "other" for the European viewer. The military officer is clad in a colorful armor and an elaborate hat with a neck cover, holding a quiver with a dozen of arrows decorated with the symbol of *yin* and *yang*, which signify his military identity. The lady wears a formal "dragon robe," which was customary for an official's wife during the occasions when the couple appeared together in public, as the lady, although herself not a dignitary, was entitled to the rank held by her husband. The lady doesn't have a rank badge on her chest, which would point to the rank her husband held, but only shows a stylized and much embellished dragon head on her robe, which differed from the regulations of the official dress code at court. She is also wearing the long "court necklace" and a tiara that was typically worn by noble ladies in the late imperial China.[7]

The faces of the military officer and the lady in the formal attire are painted using the typical mixture of Chinese and Western stylistic elements. The original flatness of the Chinese portraiture can still be felt from the imperfections like the awkward position of the man's eyes, but the shading is nevertheless utilized to a certain degree to suggest a round shape of the face and enlivens the features of the person. The lady has a comparatively more Chinese appearance, but areas of darker and pink color can also be seen in her face, suggesting a kind of Western modeling.

Due to their supposed origin in or in the vicinity of Guangzhou, these two works were cataloged as "Cantonese reverse glass paintings" when they arrived in the NGP

2 *Military Officer in Formal Attire* and *Lady in Formal Attire*, China, reverse painting on glass, 48.2×33 cm and 47×32 cm, NGP, Vm 2985 and Vm 2986.

collection. Their origin is, however, not very clear—they were transferred to the NGP in 1962 from a depot, where the property confiscated from the former aristocrats and entrepreneurs had been gathered after the communist takeover in 1948. This means that they must have been part of a private person's collection, but unfortunately the information about their original owners is lost. We can only surmise that the paintings were part of the decoration of a noble mansion, alongside porcelains, lacquers, and other luxury objects collected by the aristocracy and later also by the well-off industrialists around Central Europe, such as the Breda family mentioned above.

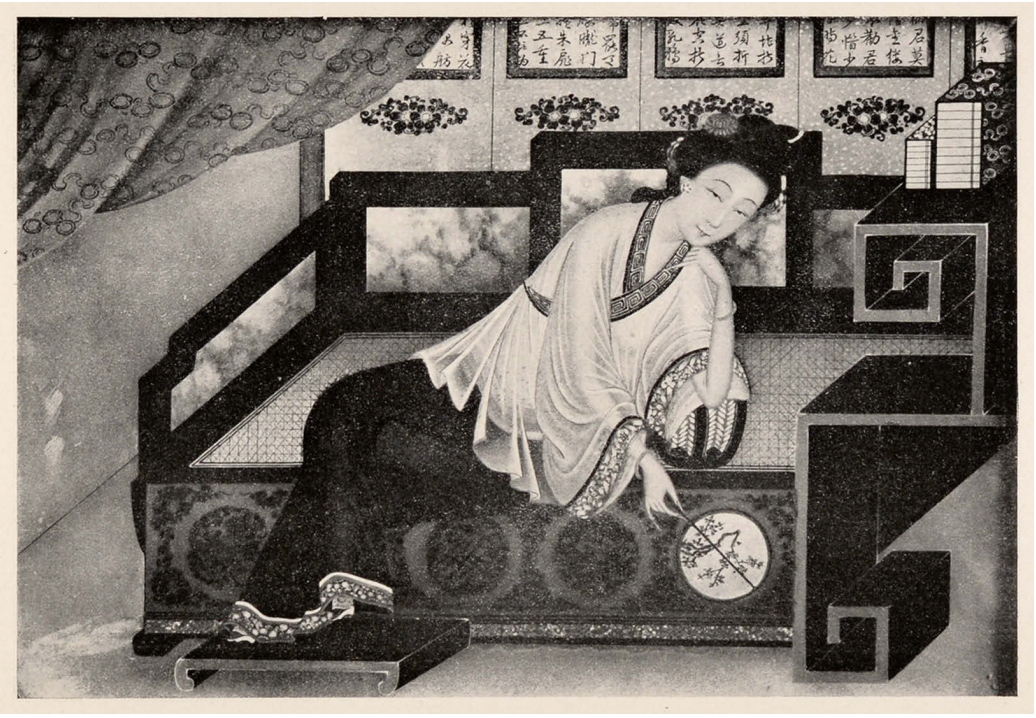
Further, the reverse glass paintings in the NGP collection include a painting of the dramatic landscape in southern China with a coastline, where Chinese as well as Western ships anchor in front of a complex of buildings (fig. 3). The painting's origin is again unknown. It was bought in an antiquarian shop for the NGP collections in 1985 and no references to its previous owner are preserved. It is, however, remarkable for the fact that the exact location depicted in the painting is recorded there. In the top left corner three characters, *Huadi jing* 花地景, can be seen, and the stone gate in the bottom left part of the painting carries four characters, *Da tong yan yu* 大通煙雨. This identifies the building complex as the Datong Monastery (*Datong si* 大通寺) in Guangzhou by the Huadi River. This was a place much favored by late Qing dynasty merchants and foreigners alike for its beautiful natural scenery and great vistas. It is therefore no surprise that the site became a subject of a commemorative reverse painting

3 *Datong Monastery in Guangzhou*, China, reverse painting on glass, 35.5 × 51 cm, NGP, Vm 5905.

on glass, with ships in the foreground and buildings of the monastery against the ruffled mountain peaks taking up the main part of the picture. It might be a rare surviving view of the monastery, where a famous Well of Mist and Drizzle (*Yanyu jing* 煙雨井) was admired as one of the local scenic spots before the temple was destroyed during the Japanese invasion of Guangzhou and later urban expansion of the city in early twentieth century.

Paintings Acquired by the Collector and Art Dealer Josef Martínek

The second group of three paintings from the NGP collection was brought to Czechoslovakia in 1931 by the collector Josef Martínek (1888–1976). One of those few travelers and adventurers who spent lengthy periods of time in China from the late imperial time until the Republican period, Martínek amassed a sizeable collection of Chinese and Tibetan antiquities and sold parts of it in Europe. He organized a number of exhibitions in London, Prague, and other European cities, and set up three shops in Czechoslovakia—two in Prague and one in the spa city of Karlovy Vary—during the 1930s. In one of his articles, Martínek claims that he brought numerous new items of Chinese art in the summer of 1931. The paintings on glass no doubt belonged to this group, as he only showed this type of artwork in late 1931 for the first time.
In the catalog of his 1931 exhibition titled *The Exhibition of Chinese Art – Collection of J. Martínek*, there are twelve Chinese reverse glass paintings marked out in a separate



4 *Lady in a Summer Dress*, China, reverse painting on glass, 48×36 cm, reproduction from Martínek 1931, Cat. No. 572, whereabouts of the original presently unknown.

category, each with a title, dimensions, and a precise dating. One of them is the *Lady in a Summer Dress*, dated to the Qianlong period (1736–1796), the whereabouts of which are unknown today, but its reproduction is preserved in the catalog (fig. 4).[8] Although it might not have survived, it was remarkably close in its style to the two paintings that are now kept in the NGP: *A Lady with a Fan* and *A Lady with a Book* (figs. 5–6). They are all very similar especially in the rendering of the ladies' faces, hands, and clothes, but also in the emphasis on text and calligraphy, which can be seen on the framed panes in the background of the lost painting and in the book and on the fan in the hands of the ladies on the surviving paintings.

The fan carries a standard seven-syllable poem, which is written neatly, without awkward characters or mistakes, which can often be found on Chinese export art, and thus can be easily deciphered. In the book, two lines of characters are visible that identify its contents as the famous *Romance of the Western Chamber*. The prominent use of text creates a certain literary atmosphere in all these paintings, together with books depicted in the corner of the room in the lost painting and other paraphernalia of literati. In contrast, such items were completely absent from the pair of paintings of the military official and a lady in official dress. The style of writing in the three paintings from Martínek's collection is markedly similar and we can thus assume that these originated from the same workshop.

Furthermore, there is a third picture in the NGP collection that came from Josef Martínek: a painting of *Two Boys*—perhaps residents of one of the Christian missionary

5 *Lady With a Fan*, China, reverse painting on glass, 51.5×37 cm, NGP, Vm 5536.

6 *Lady With a Book*, China, reverse painting on glass, 51.5×37 cm, NGP, Vm 5537.

convents, where the reverse glass painting started to be produced in the eighteenth century, or possibly just a variation on the classical Chinese topic of children at play (fig. 7). This painting is executed in a slightly different, but still closely related painting style. It has an empty background, no furniture or other accessories around the figures, and the attention is devoted fully to the nicely adorned robes of the boys, their handsome little faces and the way they hug each other, obviously caught in a moment of an intimate conversation. Their lips are painted in a similar way as those of the beautiful ladies, but the faces are much rounder, and we can see delicate shading used to render a convincing three-dimensional expression. The painting can be most probably identified with the one called *Boys* in Martínek's 1931 catalog, which is regrettably not illustrated, but has exactly the same dimensions as the painting preserved in the NGP.[9]

There were eight more paintings exhibited by Martínek in 1931 with the following titles: "573. *Leisure* (Qianlong Period), 574. and 575. *Theatre Play* (Daoguang Period), 576. *Lady With a Child* (Daoguang Period), 580. *Lady* (no dating given), 581. *Lovers* (Daoguang Period), 582. *Lady With a Watch* (Daoguang Period), and 583. *Two Ladies* (Qianlong Period)."[10] These are now lost, and we can only hope that some of them might still resurface in a private collection, where they have perhaps survived unnoticed until now. It is also obvious from the preserved examples that the dates given

7 *Two Boys*, China, reverse painting on glass, 40×30 cm, NGP, Vm 5538.

by Martínek in his catalog were very optimistic and were probably set by the Chinese dealers he bought the artworks from. Rather than originating in the Qianlong or Daoguang periods, the extant reverse glass paintings of beautiful ladies were most likely produced in the Republican period, during the very time Martínek traveled to China to acquire works for his exhibitions.

Paintings Acquired by the Painter, Art Teacher, and Collector Vojtěch Chytil

The third and final group of Chinese reverse glass paintings from the NGP collection came to Europe around 1930 with yet another important collector of Asian art: Vojtěch Chytil (1896–1936), who was a painter and spent several years in China in the 1920s, where he taught European painting at the Beijing Fine Arts Academy.[11] At the same time, he made a name for himself especially by collecting works of modern Chinese ink painting by such masters as Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1864–1957), Chen Banding 陳半丁 (1876–1970), and Xiao Sun 蕭愻 (1883–1944), including a number of interesting but nowadays completely forgotten artists. In a pioneering attempt to put these on a par with the much-admired ancient Chinese painters, he amassed a collection of several hundred modern Chinese ink paintings that is to this day one of the most significant collections in the West. Had it depended solely upon him and his interests, Chytil

8 *Fortress on a Hill*, Japan (?), reverse painting on glass, reproduction from Chytil 1931, dimensions and whereabouts of the original presently unknown.

would no doubt have devoted his energies fully to exploring the works of the young and older modern Chinese painters, and concentrated on acquainting the West with them. During the decade between 1928, when Chytil mounted his first exhibition of his Chinese art collection in Prague, and his death in 1936, he organized more than twenty exhibitions in a number of cultural centers around the Central Europe, such as Prague, Berlin, Budapest, Vienna, and even as far as London.

However, when we study his career more closely, it becomes obvious that his efforts to spread the name of modern Chinese ink painting in Europe met with a lukewarm response at best. Sadly, the collectors of his era, rather than buying a brand-new Qi Baishi, asked Chytil to bring back from his acquisition trips to the Far East old Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist sculpture, ancient paintings, and paintings on glass by the so-called Chinese primitive painters. As testified by archival evidence, Chytil often purchased these based on orders placed specifically by his friends and clients.

An authentic report about the demand for these paintings is provided by Chytil himself in his letter to Bedřich Feuerstein dated 8 February 1931: "In all of Beijing, there are no more than four paintings on glass that would fall within our consideration. We discussed this with you in detail at that time, and there is no delivery. A collection from Shansi [Shanxi 山西] Province is expected to arrive in about two weeks' time."[12] In another letter, Chytil reports on further developments: "The situation is worse with

9 *Lady With a Flower*, China, reverse painting on glass, 51.5×46.5 cm, NGP, Vm 1899.

paintings on glass. I bought three very original ones: two landscapes and one portrait. Otherwise it is all 'junk' or kitsch!"[13] It is obvious that in the early 1930s, old paintings were in high demand and Chytil worked hard to acquire such paintings in China, whether singly or in whole sets. He operated mainly in Beijing, but mentions deliveries from the Shanxi province, where some of the reverse glass painting workshops obviously operated during the interwar period.

After Chytil's return from Beijing in mid-1931, ten reverse glass paintings featured in his next exhibition, some marked as belonging to his own collection and offered for sale, and two marked as part of the collection of the architect Josef Havlíček.[14] Chytil had also previously sold a Chinese painting on glass of a Madonna icon to a client and was interested in borrowing it for the exhibition in 1931.[15] In the illustrations part of Chytil's 1931 catalog we can find two reproductions of paintings on glass, one of a Chinese girl with a flower and one of a landscape, which is most probably Japanese (fig. 8).[16] Two of the paintings that originate in Chytil's collection survive now in the NGP. These are the *Lady With a Flower* (fig. 9), which came from the collection of the

10 *Girl With a Flower*, China, reverse painting on glass, 30×20.5 cm, NGP, Vm 2585.

painter Emil Filla and was received into the NGP from Filla's widow after his death, and the *Girl With a Flower*, which was reproduced in the catalog as mentioned above. NGP bought this painting from the heirs of the architect Bedřich Feuerstein (fig. 10). The remaining paintings from the dozen recorded in the 1931 exhibition catalog are lost.

Chinese Reverse Glass Painting and Czech Modernism

From the archival evidence and the acquisition history of the NGP pieces, it is obvious that Chytil sold a number of Chinese reverse glass paintings to painters, sculptors, and architects active on the Czech art scene in the interwar period. The question thus arises: Why did these paintings appeal to so many modernist artists, and what was it that led the stark proponents of such styles as Cubism and Surrealism in painting, or functionalism in architecture, to collect these works of popular art? The list of artists

who owned reverse glass paintings brought from the Far East by Vojtěch Chytil includes the painter Emil Filla (1882–1953), whose importance for the development of modern painting styles in Czech art was sometimes compared to that of Picasso for French modernism.[17] Further, Chytil was close to the architect and stage designer Bedřich Feuerstein (1892–1936), who spent some time in Japan, visited Chytil in China during his Japanese sojourn, and whose approach was influenced by Far Eastern art most directly.[18] Some reverse glass paintings were also in the collection of Josef Havlíček (1899–1961), who in turn became famous by constructing gigantic functionalist buildings in Prague and other cities in Czechoslovakia, which were praised as daring and hugely innovative by such luminaries as Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier. To understand the importance of Chinese reverse glass paintings for these artists, we have to look more closely at the artistic development during the first decades of the twentieth century.

From the mentions in Chytil's exhibition catalogs and related archival sources, it becomes clear that reverse glass paintings were referred to as "paintings by Chinese primitives" or "Chinese primitive paintings" during the early decades of the twentieth century. This was not to say that the paintings were considered primitive in the sense of a simple or uncivilized manner of execution, but rather that they were classified as belonging to the works that inspired European primitivism, one of the movements in modern art. As Tomáš Winter shows in his groundbreaking study of the reception of non-European elements in Czech art before World War II, a formalistic, aestheticizing approach started to prevail in the treatment of non-European works over the earlier ethnographic approach during the 1910s.[19] The objects were taken out of their original context and understood purely on the basis of their form, treatment of space, movement, or color. The collections of the advocates of the primitivist movement and their sources of inspiration were a heterogeneous mixture of old European and non-European works of different periods and styles: Romanesque, Gothic, and Baroque art, African, Oceanic, and Pre-Columbian creations, works from different Asian countries, as well as folk and naïve art.[20] These works of art were not understood in terms of artistic expression; rather, they were seen in terms of form and subject matter. In the work of modern artists, the mixture of these sources was recast into individual artistic styles, distinct for each of the above-mentioned personalities.

Moreover, when organizing the first exhibitions of the Czech primitivists, the curators of the exhibitions included not only the newest creations of the avant-garde artists, but also a number of their sources of inspiration, making it a curious assortment of old and new, local and foreign.[21] For example, the third exhibition of the Group of Fine Artists (a formation of modernist artists that introduced cubism in the Czech milieu during the short period between 1911–14) included a wide selection of French and German contemporary works by modern artists side by side with Gothic sculpture, a large set of popular paintings on glass of European origin, folk carvings, and ceramics.[22] In this way, it becomes obvious that, for the emerging modern styles, folk paintings on glass (initially from different European regions) belonged to the stimuli that the artists turned

to for directness, simplicity, and unaffectedness, which represented for them a remedy for the faults of empty academicism.

Emil Filla was one of the leading members of the Group of Fine Artists and a prominent proponent of Czech Cubism. It is thus not surprising that he was, among others, inspired by folk paintings on glass, which influenced his oeuvre even more strongly in later periods, especially in regard to his Expressionist and Fauvist works.[23] While Filla and his colleagues from the Group of Fine Artists collected mainly Czech, Bavarian, or Slovakian paintings on glass in the 1910s, the opportunity to acquire Asian counterparts arose with the pioneering Chinese art exhibitions brought to Czechoslovakia by Vojtěch Chytil during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Chinese paintings on glass in fact featured more than one of the aspects that fueled the modernist imagination: the simplicity, flatness, and directness of the use of color, common in popular painting in any culture, combined with the exotic imagery and symbolism of Asian art.

As for the architects Bedřich Feuerstein and Josef Havlíček, they engaged not only in designing modern buildings, although these represent their most abiding legacy, but both architects were also part of groups of avant-garde artists, such as the Mánes Fine Arts Union (where Filla, too, was a leading member), and created drawings, sculptures, and other types of artworks besides their architectural designs, exploring the wide range of primitivist ideas and sources mentioned above. It was thus more in these disciplines—such as in Feuerstein's Symbolist stage designs or Havlíček's Cubist sculptures—that they took inspiration from folk paintings on glass, including Asian ones. The purist interiors projected by Feuerstein or functionalist constructions built by Havlíček are most likely not directly connected to Chinese reverse glass painting from their collections, but represent other extreme directions of their modernist attitudes, including countless experiments with form and space.

Based on the approaches described above, the Chinese reverse glass paintings became important parts of the collections of Czech modernist artists. In this way, the otherwise marginal genre of Chinese art gained popularity as a highly specific category of collectibles, quite distinct from their earlier role as an object of ethnographic appreciation or simply a decorative work of art.

1 I am indebted to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation International Sinological Center at Charles University, Prague, for supporting my research for this paper and for the trip to the conference in Romont. For more on the collecting of Asiatica at the court of Rudolf II, see Bukovinská 2001 and Pejčochová 2019a.

2 For details, see e.g., Suchomel 2015 and Suchomel/Suchomelová 2002.

3 For a biographical study of Dvořák, see Lomová et al. 2020.

4 For a short description of Dvořák's collecting interests, which were broad and covered objects from most Asian regions, as well as other non-European areas, see Lomová et al. 2020, 43–45. The author quotes period sources who mention the fact that Dvořák's apartment felt like a museum. This resulted from his enthusiastic treasure hunting in local art and curio shops, one of the very few pastimes with which the otherwise austere professor indulged himself.

5 Borák 2009, 860–861.

6 Acton 1987, 112.

7 For more on the court regulations for dress and its depictions in different situations, see Wang/Stuart 2018.
8 Martínek 1931, cat. no. 572.
9 Martínek 1931, cat. no. 579.
10 Martínek 1931, 28.
11 For Chytil's career and collecting activities, see Pejčochová 2019b.
12 Archive of Architecture of the National Technical Museum in Prague, Papers of Bedřich Feuerstein, letter from Vojtěch Chytil to Bedřich Feuerstein dated 8 February 1931.
13 Archive of Architecture of the National Technical Museum in Prague, Papers of Bedřich Feuerstein, letter from Vojtěch Chytil to Bedřich Feuerstein dated 13 March 1931.
14 Chytil 1931, 24. No titles of these paintings are mentioned in Chytil's catalog. They are collectively termed as "paintings on glass by Chinese primitive artists" and only their catalog numbers 111–120 are recorded.
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16 Chytil 1931, unpaginated appendix with plates. For the suggestion of the Japanese provenance of the second painting, I am indebted to Hans Bjarne Thomsen.
17 For a detailed discussion of Filla's interest in non-European art, see Winter 2005 and, in a wider context, Winter 2013.
18 For the summary of Feuerstein's life, work, and interest in Japanese art, see Čapková 2016. For his relationship with Vojtěch Chytil and trip to China, see Pejčochová 2019b, 141–152.
19 Winter 2013, 89.
20 Winter 2013, 130.
21 For a similar rediscovery of reverse glass paintings by the artists of the Blaue Reiter collective in Germany, and their importance specifically for the work of Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), see Steger/Oesterle/Bretz 2019.
22 Winter 2013, 129, in a broader context also Hume 2012.
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REGIONAL RECEPTIONS OF REVERSE GLASS PAINTING

13

REFLECTIONS IN A CHINESE MIRROR
WESTERNERS REINTERPRETED IN EARLY CANTONESE GLASS PAINTING

Patrick Conner

Abstract

As seen from the auction records of the Swedish East India Company, a number of Chinese reverse glass paintings were brought back from Canton to Stockholm in the 1740s—probably including the portraits of the supercargo and investor John Pike and his wife. In their wake came reverse glass portraits of the Swedish king and queen, followed by comparable portraits of the British royal family and (in the early nineteenth century) presidents of the United States. The creative and selective role of the Chinese artists is considered.

Keywords

Portrait, auction, Swedish, royal, freemason

The Swedish Auctions

The portraits of John Pike (dates unknown) and his wife in the Sjöhistoriska museet, Stockholm (figs. 1–2) may be the earliest surviving Chinese export reverse glass painting to which we can assign a date with any degree of confidence. If the Swedish appear to have been in the vanguard of the taste for Chinese reverse glass paintings, this may be at least partly because the trading voyages of the Svenska Ostindiska Compagniet (SOIC) are so well documented. In particular, the twenty-one volumes of Swedish company's auction catalogs, held at the Swedish National Archive and all available online, constitute a body of evidence unrivalled by the other East India companies.[1]

The SOIC's auction sales in Stockholm were international affairs. Most of the items sold (principally tea and silks, but also porcelain and other commodities) would be re-exported to other European centers; the early sales catalogs were printed in German rather than Swedish until the mid-1740s. Moreover, many of the Swedish company's supercargoes were nationals of Britain or other European countries, with which they maintained close connections, and which would quickly be made aware of any changes and novelties in exports from China.[2]

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1 *Supercargo John Pike*, ca. 1743, reverse-mirror glass painting, 104 × 62 cm, Sjöhistoriska museet, Stockholm.

2 *The Wife of Supercargo John Pike,* ca. 1743, reverse-mirror glass painting, 104 × 62 cm, Sjöhistoriska museet, Stockholm.

Colin Campbell (1686–1757), the principal pioneer of the Swedish trade with China, himself owned glass paintings: in his will he remembered many of his merchant friends and their wives and widows, among them Mrs. Catharina Christina Sahlgren (née Grubb; 1723–1772), to whom he bequeathed "my large Lackered Chest, or Chest of Drawers, with all my China, Pictures on Glass, and my Emerald Ring."[3]

Although the sales catalogs for the first few SOIC expeditions to China do not refer specifically to glass paintings, it is clear that pictures of this kind were brought back on the return voyages. In 1738, Charles Irvine (1693–1771), first supercargo on the *Fredericus Rex Sueciae*, recorded his purchase of twenty-four reverse glass paintings in Canton: "Purchased from Quouqua in 1738: 18 painted glass with lacquer'd frames and 6 painted glass with rosewood frames."[4]

On Irvine's next voyage, as first supercargo of the *Riddarhuset*, he received a request from Hugh Campbell (d. 1756), a brother of Colin and a former supercargo himself. On 17 March 1740, five days before the *Riddarhuset* was due to leave Gothenburg for Canton, Hugh Campbell asked Irvine to obtain for him "2 pairs of painted looking glass of the model herewith send you."[5]

The sales catalogs show that the Swedish were interested in Chinese paintings from the outset of their trade with China—although at the very beginning these were not necessarily paintings on glass. On the pioneering expedition of the Swedish Company in 1732–33 the *Fredericus Rex Sueciae* brought home 1,000 "Chinesische Mahlereyen" (Chinese paintings), which were then sold at auction in 53 lots of 10 or 20 each; the company itself bought 220 (in 11 lots), and Charles Pike (d. 1743) and Colin Campbell, leading investors in the China trade, bought another 15 lots between them.

In the succeeding sales catalogs—for 1736 and 1742—paintings reappear, sometimes with additional description: images of men and women, painted flowers, screens of painted paper, painted wallpaper, painted wallpaper with silver. Then in the sales catalog for the ship *Calmar*, returning from Canton to Gothenburg on 25 August 1743, no fewer than 31 reverse glass paintings are recorded. The catalogues also include the prices paid for each lot; and the highest price—indeed the highest in the entire section of "Diverse Wahren" (miscellaneous wares), containing furniture, lacquerware and other luxury items—was achieved by a large painted mirror framed in red and gold: "1 gross. gemahlt. Spiegel mit Rahm roth u. Gold."[6]

This item and the 17 glass paintings which follow in the catalog are all marked with the buyer's name "J. Pike" added in ink. On the following page, the name "H. Campbell"—no doubt Hugh Campbell, a major shareholder in the company—is written after the entry "12 kleine Portraits mit Glass über u. lacq. Rahm"; and it is possible that the entry "1 Chines. Frauenzimmer-Portrait" (presumably representing a Chinese woman rather than a Westerner) was also a reverse glass painting, given its proximity to the others and its high valuation.

The Pike Portraits

Can we identify any of these reverse glass paintings with the glass portraits of John Pike and his wife in Stockholm? Not with any certainty, but the sequence of entries with John Pike's name attached makes it plausible that this pair was included. We might also consider three glass paintings brought back on the same ship two years later—"3 St. gemahlte Glaser mit Rahmen"—in the name of "J v Utfall."[7] Jacob von Utfall (1715–1791), who made four voyages to Canton between 1736 and 1745, married John Pike's daughter Anna Elisabet in London on 6 March 1746.

The portraits of John Pike and his wife have as strong a family provenance as one could reasonably wish for (although by 1900 family tradition had elevated them to "Lord and Lady Pike").[8] The portrait of John Pike follows—or perhaps establishes—a formula favored in many reverse glass portraits for the rest of the century: the figure in his European finery appears in a Sino-European context of Western books, Chinese fruit bowl and auspicious fruit, furniture decorated in a "Chinese" rococo style, precipitous crags reminiscent of Chinese landscape paintings, and abundant flora and fauna. In this case the simple rectangular Chinese frame has been augmented by a baroque pediment added after its arrival in Sweden.

3 *Princess Lovisa Ulrika of Prussia (Queen of Sweden)*, 1745–1750, atelier of Antoine Pesne, oil on canvas, 145 × 110 cm, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

The portrait of Mrs. Pike also contains Chinese elements, notably her chair and the intricate gilt decoration on her sleeves. Since she would not have accompanied her husband to Canton, was it based on a portrait (perhaps a miniature) brought out to the Cantonese artist? If so, this original has been lost. Or is this simply an ingenious re-working of a stock "Western woman"? If we compare it with contemporary Swedish portraits, we may conclude that it was indeed based on a portrait: the hair curled up in rows close to the head, the low-cut dress with floral trim, and even the way the chin is suggested, all fit well into the traditions of Swedish portraiture of the time.[9]

Reverse Glass Royalty

If a Cantonese artist could portray the wife of a merchant on glass in her absence, then could not the same be said of a queen, or for that matter a king? In the first place, it would not be difficult to obtain an engraved portrait and carry it out to Canton; and when the version on glass came back to Europe, would it not appeal to a wide market of loyal subjects?

Chinese mirror portraits of royal and public figures became increasingly popular in the late eighteenth century, and the fashion continued into the early years of the nineteenth;

4 *Princess Lovisa Ulrika of Prussia (Queen of Sweden)*, 1745–1775, reverse glass painting, 115 × 69 cm, Nordiska museet, Stockholm.

by this time publicly recognizable figures were reproduced as multiples and widely disseminated. Possibly the earliest examples of the genre depict Prince Adolf Fredrik (r. 1751–1771), who was elected heir to the Swedish throne in 1743, and Princess Louisa Ulrika of Prussia (1720–1782). By 1744, the date of their marriage, it must have been clear to the directors and supercargoes of the SOIC that the future king and queen of Sweden would be eminently suitable subjects for reverse glass portraits. The composition from which the portrait of Louisa Ulrika was derived (of which several versions are known[10]), originated in the Berlin atelier of Antoine Pesne (1683–1757): it shows the princess's hand resting on the crown that was given to her on her wedding (fig. 3). The corresponding glass paintings also survive in several versions;[11] the appeal of a Chinese-painted royal portrait evidently persisted for several decades. Figure 4 restricts the subject to half-length, thereby eliminating hands and crown as well as background; the dark blue robe with crown motifs has been moved to the other side. The Chinese version pays close attention to details of ornament (except that the crowns embroidered on her blue robe are not quite recognizable as such), and we may detect an additional trace of humorous uplift in the royal smile. In this instance the glass painter has added no recognizably Chinese embellishment—might this have amounted to *lèse-majesté*, perhaps, in the minds of some Swedish clients? But in figure 5 we

5 *Princess Lovisa Ulrika of Prussia (Queen of Sweden)*, 1745–1775, reverse glass painting, 28×39 cm, Bukowskis Auktionshus, Stockholm.

see a bolder project: on the head and shoulders of Louisa Ulrika her bejeweled necklace and floral hairpiece are retained, and are now accompanied by a range of Chinese decorative elements: a blue-fringed canopy, suspended tassels, and a gilded perch, on which a swooping blue-and-scarlet bird threatens to upstage the royal subject.

Like his father's Prussian cousin, King George III of Great Britain and Ireland (r. 1760–1820) was portrayed in Chinese reverse glass portraits, often paired with his wife Queen Charlotte (1744–1818).[12] More commonly, and sometimes confusingly, they were also the subjects of British-made reverse glass mezzotints, in which a print would be attached to the back of the glass. Figure 7, a Chinese profile portrait of George III, is based on a mezzotint engraved by Charles Spooner (d. 1767) after Jeremiah Meyer (1735–1789) (fig. 6), a composition first published in 1761 when the newly crowned king was twenty-one. (Meyer's was not a flattering portrayal of the young king, who was often regarded as good-looking; Horace Walpole [1717–1797] wrote that "in the flower and bloom of youth George had a handsome, open and honest countenance."[13])

The Chinese artist has followed the main outlines of the print closely, but the result is something altogether more vivid and striking. The sash of the Order of the Garter

6 *King George III,* 1761, mezzotint engraving by Charles Spooner after Jeremiah Meyer, 50.3 × 35.3 cm, Sze Yuan Tang Collection.

glows with a rich blue; against the pale red of the king's coat, the stems and leaves of the floral patterning stand out strongly. The circular center of the Garter Star (in which the royal motto is copied with scrupulous accuracy) is picked out in vivid gold.

The Grand Master

George III's son and successor, a man of legendary vanity, was portrayed by a great number of artists—as Prince of Wales (1762–1811), as Prince Regent (1811–1820), and finally as King George IV (1820–1830). Chinese reverse glass paintings of the prince survive in several formats; perhaps the most ambitious is figure 9, based on an engraving dated 1802 by Edmund Scott (1758–1815) (fig. 7), who also executed the corresponding oil painting now in Brighton Museum.[14]

Scott's work celebrates the Prince's election as "Grand Master of the most Antient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons"—founding a tradition of royal Grand Masters. The prince sits on a throne which was commissioned for Thomas Sandby's Freemasons' Hall in Great Queen Street, and which may still be seen in the Museum of Freemasonry within the building that succeeded it.

7 *King George III*, late 18th century, reverse glass painting, 56 × 38.5 cm, Sze Yuan Tang Collection.

In the more vivid version illustrated here the Chinese artist has enlivened the composition by adding bright red upholstery, and a blue canopy above and to the sides. The trio of white ostrich feathers, traditional emblem of the Prince of Wales, appear in the Chinese version in in red, white, and blue.

In another version, close to the one illustrated, the glass portrait of George has a pendant: his wife, Princess Caroline of Brunswick (1768–1821).[15] Married in 1795 for economic reasons, George and Caroline suffered perhaps the most acrimonious marriage of any British royal couple, remaining together for just long enough to produce an heir. Feathered headdresses were strongly associated with Caroline, and in this case the Chinese artist—using an idealized vignette published two decades after her death—has given her a plume to match the prince's. The artist's creativity has been exercised in adding imaginary costume and chair with splendidly gilded armrests, and canopy fringe decorations which echo those of her husband.

Although the Cantonese export artists were generally skilled in representing Western script (see the Garter Star in fig. 8), on this occasion the artist has omitted the rumpled ribbon bearing the old German motto *Ich dien* ("I serve") below the coronet—an inscription hard enough for a European viewer to discern, let alone a Chinese one. (In fact, this ribbon was removed when the chair was modified at some point after the

8 *George, Prince of Wales*, 1802, engraving after Edmund Scott, 47 × 37.5 cm, Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton.

original painting and engraving were executed.) Other details are inevitably omitted or misrepresented—tassels on the masonic apron, sleeve buttons, throne arms; more surprisingly the artist has changed the leather-bound volume, a staple element of reverse glass portraiture since the days of John Pike, into something more closely resembling a Chinese book. The terrestrial and celestial globes surmounting the back of the throne, scarcely recognizable as such in the engraving, are now a gleaming white; they were in any case replaced in the 1860s.

A different (and probably earlier) version of this glass painting of the prince in masonic regalia is held by the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight. This picture can boast a royal provenance. According to a handwritten inscription on the back it was sent back from Canton for presentation to the prince:

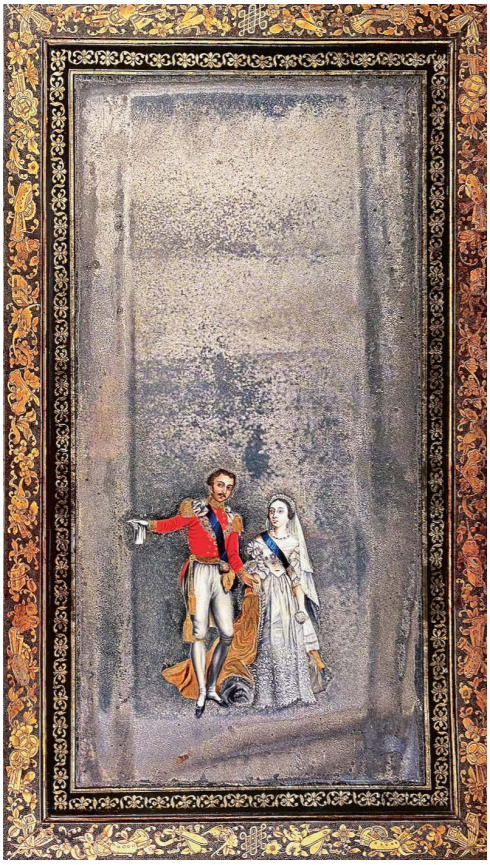
> [The portrait] was sent to William Forsteem esq. by his much esteemed brother & friend, Edmund Larkin esq. of the Shakespeare Lodge No 131, Inspector of the Teas for the Hon. E I Company at Canton, with an earnest request that it should be humbly and respectfully presented from him to His Royal Highness as a specimen of Chinese Painting.[16]

According to a further label on the Port Sunlight picture "The painting remained, in the Pavilion at Brighton for many years during the period that the Georges occupied it. When they ceased to use the Pavilion as a Royal Residence, Princess Charlotte [daugh-

9 *George, Prince of Wales*, ca. 1810, reverse glass painting, 57.5 × 42.3 cm, Museum of Freemasonry, London.

ter of the Prince] gave the picture to Miss Frances Lovatt." This may be not quite accurate, since Princess Charlotte died in 1817, and her father continued to visit the pavilion until 1827; but there is little doubt that the Prince of Wales's pavilion at Brighton did contain Chinese reverse glass paintings at an early stage, as can be seen from the accounts of the Crace firm of decorators which was largely responsible for the interior furnishing of the pavilion.

The Crace accounts record that in November 1802 Colonel John MacMahon (ca. 1754–1817) bought on behalf of the prince (among other items imported from China) four "paintings on glass" for fifty guineas. This was a very considerable price; a "very fine Japan India cabinet" bought at the same time cost £14, and a "fine Japan screen" cost £30. The following June the prince bought "four very fine paintings on glass" for £20, "three very fine paintings on glass" for 12 guineas, and (sadly) "Two very fine paintings on glass – broke" for £1 15s.[17] When he became Prince Regent he was able to transform his hitherto modest seaside residence into the exotic palace that can be seen today; many of the works of art imported from China, perhaps including these glass paintings, were replaced at this stage by chinoiserie manufactured in England or France.



10 *Queen Victoria and Prince Albert*, ca. 1850, reverse glass painting, 78 × 45 cm, Sze Yuan Tang collection.

Changing Techniques, and the American Market

In the later years of the eighteenth century, Cantonese artists continued to portray visiting merchants and sea captains "from the life," but from the 1780s onward their favored technique was painting in oils on canvas rather than glass. The artist known as Spoilum (dates unknown), who had been painting portraits of Western merchants on glass in the 1770s, was by 1784 portraying them on canvas.[18] A fabric support was no doubt less expensive and less fragile than glass; and as the Cantonese artists experimented with this unfamiliar support, they perhaps found it more flexible and more forgiving, in that mistakes could be more readily corrected on a fabric surface than on glass. At the turn of the century glass paintings and canvas paintings were available in the same studio; Fatqua (dates unknown), whose paintings on glass were sometimes signed, read "Fatqua, painter in oils and watercolors and on glass, China Street, Canton."[19] In the second quarter of the nineteenth century the well-documented "export" artist Lamqua (b. 1801) was a prolific painter of portraits in oils on canvas, but is not known to have painted on glass at all.[20]

The arrival of American ships in Canton from 1784 onward brought new orders, new tastes, new enthusiasms. The export of Chinese porcelain to Europe, once so strong but now flagging, received a boost from this new market on the other side of the globe;

and at the same time, it seems that Chinese reverse glass painting was revived by the newcomers, for whom pictures of European royalty had little interest. In 1823, an article on "Painters of Canton" was published in a Philadelphia newspaper, penned by an anonymous "Canton Supra-Cargo." The author lists some of the "stock paintings" offered in the Western-oriented shops of Canton, featuring subjects copied from engravings which have "continued to attract purchasers for a long time." These subjects include princes and heroes, literary and mythological figures, and notably a number of American subjects. He notes incongruous pairings, such as the Quaker William Penn with Miss O'Neill (the vivacious Irish actress), and Lord Nelson with "American Naval Victories"; in general, "Washington, Jefferson and Madison appear to be in great demand."[21]

By the time Queen Victoria began her reign (1837–1901) Chinese glass paintings were no longer the intricately painted and expensive rarities that they had formerly been. Exceptional items might still be produced, however. Figure 10, a portrait of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert on the day of their wedding (10 February 1840), places the principal figures within a large plain mirrored area, contained in the original lacquered frame.

The composition of the two figures is based on *The Bridal Morn*, an engraving by Samuel W. Reynolds Jr. (1773–1835) after Frederick William Lock (active 1845–1871), published in this format in 1844. Victoria and Albert did not in fact wear Garter sashes at their wedding, although they are thus portrayed in both print and glass painting. The Chinese artist has added a golden outer layer to her wedding dress. In the event Victoria wore a plain, pale satin gown with trimmings of Devon lace; white bridal gowns were not *de rigueur* until later in the nineteenth century.

The mirror painting is also supplied with a decorative lacquered backboard in which trees and pavilions form a continuous landscape. Possibly this unusual and highly-crafted piece was intended not as an item for export but as a diplomatic gift, or as a symbol of national allegiance to be hung in one of the British consulates newly established in China in the wake of the Treaty of Nanjing.

1 The catalogues are accessible via the Global History and Culture Centre at the University of Warwick: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/eac/databases/scandinavian/catalouges/>, accessed on June 2020.
2 For the role of 'private trade' and its sale at auction see von Brescius 2015, 171–179. See also Hodacs 2020.
3 Cormack 1960, 11.
4 Quoted in Van Dyke 2019, 124.
5 Quoted in Von Brescius 2015, 481.
6 Sales catalog for ship *Calmar*, returned 25 August 1743, 63, lot 2206.
7 Sales catalog for ship *Calmar*, returned 12 August 1745, 110, lot 3960.
8 See Audric 2020, 85–88 and 202–203.
9 See, for example, Alexander Roslin, *Portrait of Marie Suzanne Giroust*, 1770, Nationalmuseum, Sweden, and *Double Portrait, Perhaps Jean-Rodolphe Perronet with His Wife,* 1754, Gothenburg Museum of Art.

10 Nordiska museet, Stockholm (inv. no. NMGrh 3375, illd. Setterwall et al. 1974, 42); Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (inv. no. NMDrh 724; Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie (inv. no. 187222). <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50421362> (accessed on 15 June 2020).
11 Nordiska museet, Stockholm (inv. no. NM.0197884, and see inv. no. 54674 c); Uppsala Auktionskammares auction of 16–18 June 2020, lot 42; Bukowskis, Stockholm, auction of June 4–5 2019, lot 699.
12 See Christie's London sale of 23 November 2006, lot 81.
13 Jarrett 2000, 6–7.
14 The author's thanks are due to Mark Dennis, curator, the Library and Museum of Freemasonry, for his generous assistance and advice.
15 Offered at Christie's New York 22 January 2016, lot 215.
16 For full provenance as inscribed see Audric 2020, cat. no. 375, 218.
17 Typescript of Crace accounts held by Brighton Museums, 34–35.
18 Conner 1998, 418–425.
19 Crossman 1991, 214. The signature is sometimes misread as "Falqua": see Jourdain and Jenyns 1950, 36, 108.
20 Conner 1999, 46–64.
21 *National Gazette and Literary Register*, 4 August 1823, 1. This phenomenon has been discussed in detail in this volume by Karina Corrigan in her chapter "The Governor of Surat and the Apotheosis of Washington: Cantonese Reverse Glass Painting for Early Nineteenth-Century American Markets."

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14

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CHINESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS IN A DUTCH COLLECTION
ART AND COMMODITY

Rosalien van der Poel

Abstract

Chinese export painting had a strong appeal to foreign powers active in China and neighboring Asian countries in the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. As a result, today, Chinese export paintings can be found in eighteen public collections in the Netherlands. Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden owns some sets of Chinese reverse glass paintings. The set central to this paper consists of nineteen eighteenth-century images with an interesting provenance dating back to 1824, the year when they entered the collection of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities. In this essay Van der Poel will discuss the subject matter of the two paintings from this delicate set of oil paintings that contain elements suggesting a strong link with the period they were produced and are exemplary for the westward movement of this specific painting genre. It is clear that these commodified artworks, with their cohesive values make this painting genre distinctive and a class in its own right.

Keywords

China, the Netherlands, museum collections, Chinese reverse glass painting, export, commodity

Dutch Collections with Eighteenth-century Chinese Reverse Glass Paintings

Chinese export painting had a strong appeal to foreign powers active in China and neighboring Asian countries in the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries.[1] As a result, today, they can be found in eighteen public collections in the Netherlands (fig. 1). These collections have an historic, an artistic, and a material value. They are closely related to the overseas historical China trade, either having been brought back by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) employees, private merchants, diplomats and government workers in the Chinese port city of Canton, or collected in the Dutch colonial households in Batavia and Cape Town and the coastal cities of India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where the Dutch also had their trade settlements. These integrated economic relations produced, among other things, integrated art objects such as paint-

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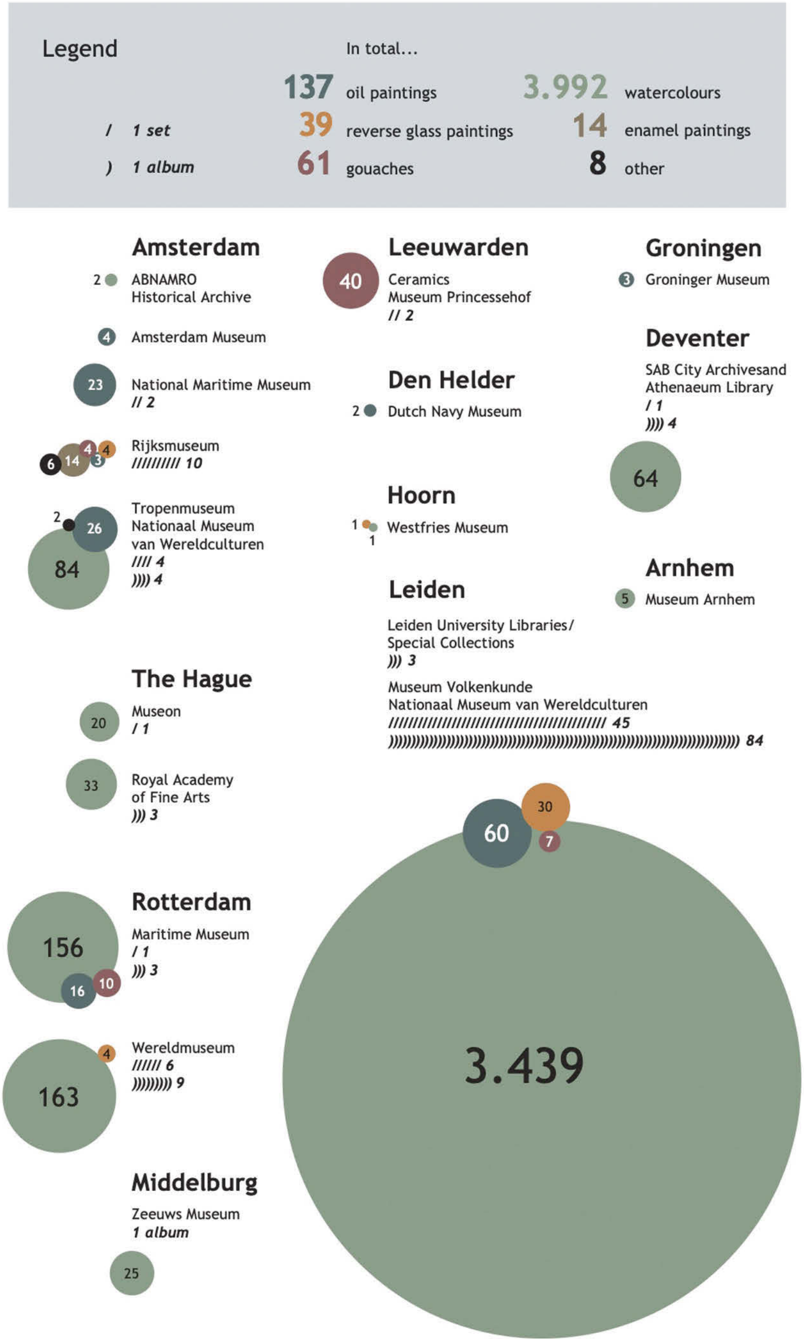
Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections



1 *Chinese Export Paintings in Dutch Collections.*

2 *Garden Scene*, 1860–1900, reverse glass painting, 49 × 34 cm, Museum Volkenkunde / Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, RV-6166-6.

ings, which, as a result of their representative and social functions, over time formed a special artistic phenomenon, and a shared cultural visual repertoire with its own Eurasian character.

The National Museum of World Cultures, which consists of Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, Afrikamuseum in Berg en Dal, Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, and Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, owns a couple of sets of Chinese reverse glass paintings in its collections. This paper will consider three of these sets:

1. A small cohesive set of three nineteenth-century paintings in the Museum Volkenkunde with identical original hardwood frames that depict two harbor views and one interior-garden scene (figs. 2–4).[2] The interior scene with three figures in an open room and on a garden terrace could be a scene from a story from Chinese classical literature: "Dream of the Red Chamber, The Story of the Western Wing" or "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms." On the second painting, it is not exactly clear which location is presented.[3] The painting shows some foreign factories in China along with a customs office. It can either be the Bund in Shanghai or the port of Yuezhou (today Yueyang) with the custom building *Shangyang guan*. The third painting shows a view of the Hong Kong Harbor with white buildings and hills in the background.[4] The paintings belonged to the couple Mr. and Mrs. Reinders Folmer, who lived and worked in Shanghai, Kobe, and Tokyo in the 1930s and 1940s.

2. A set of four reverse glass paintings in the Wereldmuseum with a gilded wooden frame (fig. 5). After reading the seminal works of Jerôme Samuel, Thierry Audric, and the research of Seiichi Sasaki et al. about Indonesian painting on glass,[5] some serious doubt exists whether these four paintings were originally made in China, which was the assumption until now, or came from a (Chinese) painter in the East Indies. The set was purchased by the Wereldmuseum in 1889 from Mr. Kellen.

3. A set of nineteen eighteenth-century "sensitive plates," nineteen Chinese reverse glass paintings in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde, which deserves attention for a variety of reasons (fig. 6).[6]

3 *Harbor View*, 1860–1900, reverse glass painting, 34.4 × 50 cm, Museum Volkenkunde / Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, RV-6166-7.

4 *View of Hong Kong*, 1860–1900, reverse glass painting, 34.4 × 50 cm, Museum Volkenkunde / Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, RV-6166-8.

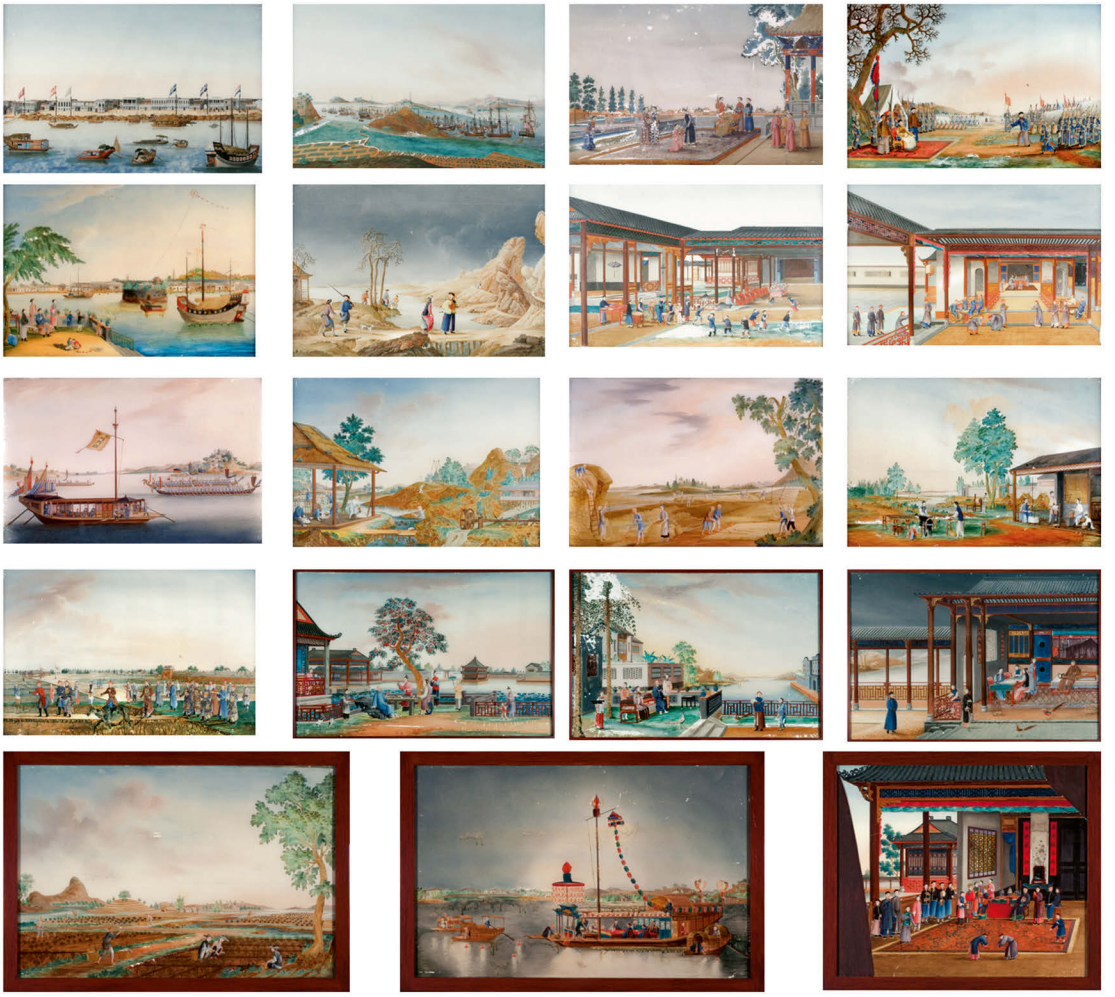
Valuable Sets

The value of these artworks as coherent sets cannot to be overestimated. Sets of paintings can be understood as "sets" because the images clearly belong together. They form a coherent whole in terms of style, color use, materials used, or as a genre. They carry identical original frames or were commissioned and/or produced simultaneously. The documentary and serial nature of a set, which is often thematically constructed, contributes to the individual images within such a set accruing value. Together, the images form a narrative that, in a logical and coherent manner, makes the unknown "exotic" scenes familiar and thus tells a meaningful story.

5 *Set of 4 Portraits of Chinese Dignitary Women*, nineteenth century, reverse glass painting, 60.5 × 45 cm (2 paintings) and 70 × 51 cm (2 paintings), Wereldmuseum Rotterdam / National Museum of World Cultures, 3954 to 3957.

"Sensitive Plates" in Leiden

"The set of 19" in Leiden has an interesting provenance dating back to 1824, the year when they entered the collection of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities in The Hague. The archive of the Royal Cabinet informs us that on the 1 May 1824 there was a purchase of paintings from China.[7] Further research in the National Archives of the Netherlands supplement the provenance information about this set. The original documents tell us that following a request to the Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences, and after a Royal Decree of 17 April 1824, the then director of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities was able to buy the set.[8]



6 *Set of 19 Reverse Glass Paintings*, 1785–1790, reverse glass painting, 52.5 × 81 cm, Museum Volkenkunde / National Museum of World Cultures, RV-360-1113 to 1131.

The *Brief Visitors' Guide to View the Collection of Rarities in the Royal Cabinet at the Mauritshuis in The Hague*, prepared by Abraham Anne van de Kasteele in 1860, mentions the display related to this set of paintings: "Nineteen paintings, beautifully painted on glass, depicting the sowing and harvesting of rice, picking tea, views of Canton, Wampo and Makkao, a camp where the emperor is reviewing troops, and interiors and verandas."[9]

In March 1883, a premise in Leiden was taken over by the National Museum of Ethnology (today Museum Volkenkunde), and the diverse national collections of ethnographica were united. This meant the end of the popular Royal Cabinet of Rarities in The Hague. At the same time Leiden received a treasure trove of ethnographic material within its city walls, along with this set of Chinese reverse glass paintings. Paid for from state coffers, the set enriched the royal collection from May 1824 to its surcease in 1883.[10]

The paintings in question were produced between 1785 and 1790. They contain elements, suggesting a strong link with this period: for example, the flags of Western countries, the house construction, or the types of ships. Similarities in technique, quality, and size lead us to assume that all of these paintings were created at approximately the same time. Furthermore, the scenes depicted in these technically inventive, detailed, and colorful paintings that are nearly all in a fine state of preservation give us valuable information about aspects of Chinese society at the end of the eighteenth century. In the course of time, however, after they had entered the museum in Leiden, it became quiet around this set of paintings. After more than a century, in the 1990s, the then curator of Chinese collections at the museum correctly attributed the set again. He researched all aspects of the different subject matter represented in the paintings, including their technical and compositional aspects. Moreover, he had them restored and subsequently organized an exhibition. In 2001, they were put on public display in the museum and an informative catalog *"Sensitive Plates": Nineteen Chinese Paintings on Glass*, to accompany the exhibition, was published.[11]

Emblematic for the Westward Movement of Chinese Export Paintings

The next part of this paper will review the two paintings with a maritime subject matter from this delicate set of reverse glass paintings in the Leiden museum that contain elements suggesting a strong link with the period they were produced and are emblematic for the westward movement of this specific painting genre (figs. 7–8). They contain concrete clues to the presence of westerners in China at that time.
The *Quay of Canton* and *Whampoa Anchorage* were two of the most outstanding places, if not the only ones in the area of Canton during the eighteenth and nineteenth century for all events related to the foreigners visiting this important Chinese port city. Almost every sea trader who visited China returned home with a painting of Canton and/or Whampoa, which were the utmost artistic symbols of the historical China trade. The painting titled *Quay of Canton* (fig. 7) depicts the Pearl River with various boats and the quay with the Western factories. In this area only foreign merchants were permitted to stay. The flags outlined against the empty sky easily identify the trading posts. From left to right we see the Danish flag, the Spanish flag (in fact, the Philippine trading company), the white flag of the French royal house, and the Swedish, British, and Dutch flags. There are some clear indications for a date of about 1785–1790 for this painting. First of all, we see the white pre-revolutionary French flag. After the revolution in 1790, the white French flag was replaced with the *tricolor*. Furthermore, the American flag is not depicted. This means that the painting can probably be dated just before 1785, when the Americans arrived in Canton for the first time. On top of these indications, the architectural elements of depicted buildings give some clear hints to the period of 1785–1790, such as the entries and balconies on the British and Dutch stations, for example. In this painting the projecting section of the entry to the British station is depicted with a closed arcade on columns. In the 1780s, a narrow entrance

7 *Quay of Canton* (from set of 19 paintings), 1785–1900, reverse glass painting, 52.5 × 81 cm, Museum Volkenkunde / National Museum of World Cultures, RV-360-1116.

with a simple roof on open columns was replaced by an entry three times as wide. Similarly, in this painting the Dutch station has a double extension on the ground floor. Before 1780s, this structure had only one floor layer.[12]

The island of Whampoa lay slightly over 100 kilometers north of Macao and 15 kilometers south of Canton. Western ships laid at anchor in this roadstead because of the Pearl River's limited navigability for the numerous big sailing ships. In the foreground of the painting *Whampoa Anchorage* (fig. 8) lies the Dane Island with fields, groves of bamboo, boggy meadowland, and a hill with the Protestant cemetery.[13] This island, like the French island to the left, was used as a burial place for Westerners.[14] In the middle of the river lies the island of Whampoa, with a strip of sand, some grass, and trees. On the island the nine-storied Pazhou Pagoda proudly rises above the trees. To the right of the trees one can see a smaller pagoda, which no longer exists.[15] Most of the ships are depicted with their topmasts struck. The masts were taken down during the months when the ships laid at anchor, so that they could not depart immediately in this condition. All the commodities they brought with them were shipped from Whampoa to Canton in river junks, or what were called *chop* boats. A special feature of this image is an extremely fine representation of the ships. Their countries of origin are easy to recognize: England, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and America. As the Americans did not begin their China trade in Canton before 1785, we may conclude that this painting was produced in that year, shortly after their arrival.

8 *Whampoa Anchorage* (from set of 19 paintings), 1785–1900, oil on glass, anonymous, 52.5 × 81 cm, Museum Volkenkunde / National Museum of World Cultures, RV-360-1115.

Some may say that these indications say nothing about the production date of the painting. Since this subject has been repeatedly copied, the representation of Canton or Whampoa can be of a situation from an earlier date and therefore can deviate from the period when the painting was actually made. In this sense, the harbor views are absolutely not indexical. It is likely, however, that Westerners never bought outdated views of Canton, because these views changed almost yearly. Architectural elements of the *hongs* in Canton, new remarkable landmarks in the cityscapes, land reclamation, and the sort and quantity of vessels in front of the quay were some of the aspects that determined whether a view of Canton is up-to-date or not.

Value Accruement and/or Dwindle?

This essay must conclude with some remarks about the evaluation of this specific painting genre of Chinese export paintings on glass. We can conclude that value always exists in the eyes of the beholder. Due to a prevailing narrow definition of art, for a long time Chinese export paintings were seen as indigenous works of art and were, as Howard Morphy states, "excluded from the art museum or gallery and often sat unrecognized in the ethnographic museum."[16] These non-European artworks were more or less denied (at least in the Netherlands) primary display spaces in the art museums, where their distinctive features could be viewed to maximum effect. How-

ever, for the future, we need to acknowledge that art museums, together with ethnographic museums, maritime museums, libraries, and archives, will become partners in collecting and collection management. This movement, currently being embraced by scholars in the field, will lead to a new outlook on these kinds of paintings by developing new overlapping relationships in collection management by designing virtual institutions in which these artworks will be compatible.

Their current value is amassed through their cultural biography, which started at the Chinese export painting market, and by their trajectory, which has accrued value during their social life, which, in turn, adds to their artistic, historical, and material value. Furthermore, the history of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century emerges for us through these paintings. They convey many stories instead of being witnesses to one single place or moment in time. On top of that, new conservation technologies, new questions, and new museum scholarship will open new meanings for them.

Thanks to these hybrid material signifiers with Chinese cultural dimensions in Dutch museums, China has a substantial visual artifactual presence throughout the Netherlands (fig. 1). This country still has a thriving sea transport industry in China and so should value this artistic commodity that has so much to do with the earlier overseas trade by the Dutch. The future, therefore, holds a promise of change for this particular painting phenomenon with its representative function. It is clear that these commodified artworks, with their cohesive values, make this painting genre distinctive and a class in its own right.

1 Parts of the text for this chapter has been taken from the dissertation *Made for Trade – Made in China: Chinese Export Painting in Dutch Collections: Art and Commodity*. See Van der Poel 2016.

2 Inv. nos. RV-6166-6 to 6166-8. For the information on the three paintings, I am indebted to Angela Reinders Folmer (1948), one of the descendants of their first owner. Her narrative made it possible to compile the life story of these privately-owned paintings until they were donated to the museum in Leiden. I have spoken to her on 24 November 2014 and later corresponded by email (16 August 2015). I have asked her the following questions: Where and when were the paintings obtained? Are there any stories known about the buying process and the time the first documented owner stayed in China or in the Dutch East Indies (diary, logbook)? Who inherited the paintings, or who owned them from the moment of their purchase to their location in the museum rack? Do you know what meaning or value was assigned to the paintings by the consecutive heirs? Can we draw any conclusions from this information? How was the decision taken to donate the paintings to a museum rather than take them to an auction? As a donor, do you have any wishes with respect to the artworks? How would you describe their value to future generations? Although Angela Reinders Folmers has checked the narrative of these paintings with her other relatives, I would, however, add a caveat, because this story is just one source and memory can play "tricks" when remembering the past.

3 Inv. no. RV-6166-7. The fluttering flags on the roofs of the foreign trading houses indicated the countries that were established in the presented port city in that period. From left to right, we see the United Kingdom (a red flag with the Union Jack in the top corner: the British red ensign), alongside the United States, next to which is a building depicted with a blue flag with a white diagonal cross. This is the Scottish Saltire. A flag with a slightly smaller cross is the house flag of the Aberdeen, Newcastle & Hull Steam Co., from Aberdeen. On the far right, we see the French tricolor. Then, pictured in the foreground are three black screw-propeller steam ships with flags. From left to right: United Kingdom, with the red ensign, France, with the tricolor and a second

white flag with red triangles in the four corners and two large black cursive letters "WW." This WW is an inverted "MM," indicating the house flag of the Cie. des Messageries Maritimes from Paris, and pictured on the front far right of the painting is a ship with a white, triangular flag with a red diagonal stripe. Alongside the steam corvettes, in the water in front of the quay, a small clipper in full sail is visible. Source flags: Lloyd's book of house flags and funnels: http://www.mysticseaport.org/library/initiative/ImPage.cfm.

4 Inv. no. RV 6166-8. On the buildings, painted in a repeating motif, eleven house flags flutter on the back row of foreign shipping companies. From left to right we can distinguish: 1. Aberdeen, Newcastle & Hull Steam Co., Dundee & Newcastle Steam Shipping Co. Ltd., or Indo China Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. London; 2. and 3. Both, United Kingdom with the Union Jack in the top corner: the British red ensign; 4. United States; 5. English house flag; 6. France; 7. Unknown; 8. R & C Allen, Glasgow of International Line Steamship Co. Ltd. (Christopher Marwood Whitby); 9. Denmark; 10. England; 11. Richard Irvin & Sons Ltd., Aberdeen, Eastern Shipping Co. Penang of Dolphin Steam Fishing Co. Ltd., Grimsby. In the foreground of the painting, we can see three black British screw propeller steamships, recognizable from the flags. From left to right, a ship with a red flag with the Union Jack in the top corner, the red ensign. In the middle is a ship with a flag divided diagonally into four quarters: white on the top, blue on the left side, red on the right side, yellow on the bottom (which has fallen off the painting). This is the house flag of the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Nav. Co., London, 1834.

5 Samuel 2005, Audric 2020, and Sasaki et al. 1989.

6 Inv. nos. RV-360-1113 to RV-1131, Van der Poel 2016, 118–119.

7 Effert 2003, 263: NA 2.04.01-4925; ANH 836: 134a.

8 NA 2.04.01, 4855, 12 April 1824, and 26 April 1824, no.99, A-series.

9 Van de Kasteele 1860, 29.

10 NA 2.04.01, 4925, Index 1824, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Fifth Dept. Education, Arts and Sciences 1815-1848. "Executie 1 mei 8.F"; NA 2.04.01, 4882, 1 May 1824, F-series; NA 2.04.01, 4917, 1 May 1824.

11 Van Dongen 2001. In *Sensitive Plates* Van Dongen describes each of the paintings individually in terms of their iconography and iconology. He also provides a brief overview of the history of this art form, which began in eighteenth-century China. Apparently, the Jesuits introduced the technique and the accompanying use of materials into China around 1760.

12 Crossman 1991, 431.

13 Ibid.

14 Conner 2002, 81.

15 Gregory 2005, 93.

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15

CHINA AND ITS SOUTH
CHINESE LADIES ON GLASS AND OTHER TOPICS IN NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY JAVA AND BALI

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Abstract

For almost a century (1870s–1970s) glass has been widely used as a new and prestigious medium for painting on the island of Java. During this time, millions of pieces have likely been produced by Javanese painters for the Javanese public. Chinese painters and reverse glass paintings certainly played an important role in disseminating this art in the Dutch East Indies from the second half of the eighteenth century onward.

This text tries to track down the role and place of Chinese painters and themes in the development of reverse glass painting in Java and Bali during the late nineteenth and the twentieth century. Among various iconographic themes related to China, it focuses also on "Chinese Ladies" portraits, whose popularity reminds us of the antiquity and the importance of the Chinese communities living on these islands. It concludes with the Chinese legacy in contemporary Javanese glass painting, mainly through its developments in the city of Cirebon.

Keywords

Art history, reverse glass painting, China, Indonesia, Java, Bali

Reverse glass painting spread throughout Asia, including Southeast Asia, from the eighteenth century onward, and in some places enjoyed remarkable success until the twentieth century. Despite the European origin of this art form, China played a considerable role in its Southeast Asian diffusion, thanks to the dynamism of the Cantonese workshops.[1] This role is well established in the case of India[2] or Thailand,[3] but remains little known as far as Indonesia is concerned, even though reverse glass painting met with a real craze in the archipelago, particularly in Java. The present paper aims to present this Chinese contribution by studying Chinese-themed reverse glass paintings found in Indonesia, whatever their origin. In the following pages, I will try to evaluate the role of Chinese painters and products in Indonesia, based on the rare indications available, then I will detail the different Chinese themes found in the archipelago, associating them with their audiences, Chinese or local. I will end with a few notes on

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the Chinese heritage, as it can still be observed today, particularly in the region of Cirebon (Java).
Our corpus is extracted from a database of 2,170 reverse glass paintings, mostly produced in Java and Bali, surveyed and documented *in situ* but also taken from a handful of existing publications, mainly Sasaki et al.[4] Very few of these paintings are signed, even fewer are dated, but the oldest could date back to the late 1880s and the most recent from the first decade of the twenty-first century; most were produced between the 1930s and 1960s.
The Chinese-themed paintings make up a small fraction of this database, 125 items only, with two specific features: first, part of them were not produced in Indonesia but imported from China, in proportions that are difficult to determine with certainty; second, it has not been possible to have direct access to many of these paintings, which have disappeared or are now unlocatable, and only known through poor black-and-white reproductions.

Context

It is not known when reverse glass painting became a living art in Indonesia. The very first paintings may have been introduced as early as the seventeenth century by the Dutch[5], but it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that Javanese painters appropriated a medium that had long remained rare and expensive. Half a century later, the use of glass in painting was well established; these objects, now more affordable, were becoming increasingly popular. In the course of the twentieth century, hundreds of thousands, if not millions of pieces, were produced for the Javanese public, whose range of themes and subjects covered almost everything that Javanese painting and drawing could produce. It mainly includes figures and scenes from the *wayang kulit* (shadow theater), Muslim calligraphy and religious buildings, the mount of the Prophet (Burāq), mystical and apotropaic compositions, brides and grooms in their marriage attire, comic sketches from Javanese comedy and episodes from the history of Java, some landscapes, buildings, ships.[6]

The Chinese Influx

What was the role of the Chinese in the introduction and diffusion of reverse glass painting and its techniques in Java? It was most probably essential, although the Dutch themselves traded glass and reverse glass paintings with their Asian partners via Batavia from the beginning of the seventeenth century, at a time when the Chinese were not yet familiar with this art.[7]
From the end of the eighteenth century, probate inventories drawn up in Batavia mention the presence of reverse glass paintings belonging to Chinese merchants.[8] If we consider other media than glass, the presence of Chinese painters is also attested in Batavia a few decades earlier[9] and there are several testimonies for the nineteenth century.[10]

Closer to our time, a painting from our corpus bears direct witness to the presence of Chinese reverse glass painters, through a bilingual Chinese-Malay label affixed to the back of a large bird-and-flower painting on an engraved mirror, dating from the 1920s. The Chinese text is difficult to read, but the Malay part explicitly states that the owner of the workshop, an anonymous Chinese from Semarang (Central Java), who was also a pharmacist, had brought "from China a very skillful reverse glass painter" (*toekang teken katja dari Tiongkok sangat pande*), capable of painting according to all types of models, Chinese as well as European, and also offers courses, both in painting on glass and in preparing colors for this purpose.[11] Other paintings of the same style and which can be considered contemporary bear the stamp of active workshops in Batavia and Surabaya. After the war and independence, as migration flows diminished and changed in nature, Chinese patrons in Jakarta called on Javanese painters to produce "Chinese" mirror painting (years 1954–55).[12]

That said, it is clear that part of the pieces produced in China were exported to Java, at least until the first decades of the twentieth century; this is probably the case for more than a quarter of the corpus, particularly the scenes from Chinese novels, and some of these paintings were in turn reproduced in Indonesia. Two representations of Chinese Ladies are an example of this (figs. 4–5). The first Lady, in a pose imbued with sensuality, handkerchief in hand and arms stripped bare, the small feet emphasized by the red color of the shoes, is similar to an oil painting on canvas now in a Dutch collection.[13] The second, produced in Java, a recent and awkward grisaille, takes up an old and no less sensual model on glass, where the Lady's arms and breast are clearly visible through the transparency of the robe.[14] But other types of models have circulated, as shown in figure 1, no doubt made from a print: in Java as elsewhere, painters may have used paper models derived, for example, from popular New Year's imagery.[15]

Finally, before introducing the themes of these Chinese pieces, it should be pointed out that this production, when local, differs from "Javanese" production by the size and quality of the medium: large glass panes, engraved geometric decorations, triptychs, mirrors are not exceptional. In Java, the use of mirrors in painting is moreover considered to be specific to Chinese taste.

Main Themes

All the themes presented below are common in China and in Chinese reverse glass painting for export.[16] They form two sets: paintings intended exclusively for a clientele of Chinese or Creole culture,[17] and others mainly produced for a local clientele, i.e., Javanese or Balinese.

Meeting the Chinese Public

None of these pieces predate the first decades of the twentieth century, with the exception of scenes from novels, some of which may be much older; none were pro-

1 *Siming zhaojun* 司命昭君 (The Kitchen God), 1950s, reverse glass painting, 46×29.2 cm, Private Collection, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

duced under the regime of General Suharto (r. 1966–1998), who banned Chinese culture in Indonesia. Half of these paintings bear a Chinese inscription, indicating clearly their clientele.

Quantitatively speaking, the most important of these series consists of paintings of the bird-and-flower genre (fifteen items), almost all bearing an inscription in Chinese characters: wedding vows essentially, in one case business success. The examination, even indirect, of the paintings and frames, the engravings made on the material, the formulation of certain wishes for happiness,[18] confirms the approximate recent dating of these objects.

The novel scenes, which are only slightly fewer in number (twelve items), include battle scenes inspired by the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义; Malay and Indonesian: *Samkok*); they seem older. A few paintings can be compared to those exhibited in various royal *wat* of Bangkok,[19] in particular, stylistically speaking, those of the temples of Wat Pho and Wat Thepthidaram. In the Dutch Indies, the novel was translated into Malay, the language of the Chinese communities in Java, in extracts as early as 1883 and in full in 1910–13,[20] but it had long been familiar to the local Chinese communities; *Guan Yu* 關羽, the central character of the novel, "is omnipresent in the *Peranakan* [Sino-Indonesian] community [and] his cult in Batavia dates back at

2 *Lòushì* 陋室 (Humble Abode), n.d., reverse glass painting, 44.6×61 cm, Private Collection, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

least to the end of the 17th century."[21] Scenes from the novel were depicted in Java temples and probably private homes.[22] Most of these scenes reproduced on glass remain to be identified.

All of the pieces belonging to the subset of deities and nymphs (eleven items, three of which bear an inscription) were produced locally. I will briefly come back later to the representations of *Guanyin* 观音, which are very recent, as the paintings concerned are part of Cirebon's "Chinese" heritage. Not surprisingly, we find here a representation of *Guan Yu* 關羽, main characters of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*; but the "god of cooking" (Fig. 1, *Siming zhaojun* 司命昭君) is a rare figure in Java,[23] whose iconography and name are uncertain here. Although it may have been painted from a Chinese print, various elements are reminiscent of a Javanese or a local colonial iconographic code: paved floors, colonnade-like banners of an interior; and the colors and floral motifs also lead us to date it to the 1950s. The use of silver paper, which is not very common and better suited to small surfaces, is also worth noting; in this case it may have been used as a mirror substitute for less wealthy clients.

In addition, there are views of buildings set in picturesque landscapes (five items) and, finally, a few calligraphic inscriptions (three items). Painting figure 2 (*lòushì* 陋室, humble abode) is remarkable, less for its calligraphy than for the ornamentation intended to enhance it. It bears witness to a refined Creole visual culture, drawing on a vein more Western than Javanese.

Meeting Local Demand: Chinese Ladies and Princesses

By far the most frequent theme among all these Chinese reverse glass paintings is that of the "Chinese Lady": seventy-seven items (over sixty percent of the corpus considered). Also common in China and in production for export,[24] this theme depicts a Chi-

nese woman or maiden at her table or window, surrounded by a number of everyday objects: tea set, pipe, books, fan, occasionally a musical instrument. They are sometimes depicted reading, more rarely playing an instrument or dancing. In most cases, these Chinese Ladies are dressed in Qing costume, therefore of contemporary times, often in blue. The paintings do not bear any inscriptions, with one exception, a late and fanciful one. These figures can hardly be described as portraits; beyond the anonymity suggested by the generic denomination used to designate them, the Chinese Ladies have a stereotypical side, hardly individualized, and the distinctions that can be made with regards to furniture or poses only correspond to the choices of painters or workshops. In this respect, they are in no way to be confused with the real, highly realistic portraits, on canvas or paper, produced in Java and in British Straits Settlements (Singapore, Malacca, Penang) during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth century,[25] which are contemporary to them. This does not preclude great formal similarities between these two types of paintings in the composition and hieraticism of the figures, which can be compared to the photographic portraits highly prized by the Javanese nobility from the mid-nineteenth century onward, and all these objects are part of a new visual and decorative culture.
These representations can be found in both Java and Bali, but have different names and can be associated with significantly different historical, cultural, and aesthetic contexts.

In Java (Forty-five Items)

In Java, the "Chinese Princesses" (*Putri Cina*) or "Champa Princesses" (*Putri Campa*), as they are sometimes called,[26] circulated in all the regions where reverse glass painting has been practiced, especially Cirebon, central and eastern Java.
They refer to the figure of the princess of China or of Champa, which appeared in a remote past when Sino-Javanese trade became more intense (fourteenth–fifteenth centuries)[27] and part of the Chinese communities, at least in Java, particularly well-integrated into local societies were Muslim. It was then that the theme of the prestigious union between a local sovereign and a daughter of the emperor of China, present throughout the Malay world (Malacca, Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi), came to the fore. In Java, this association concerns prestigious historical-mythical figures dating back to the fifteenth century, both the last ruler of the Hindu-Buddhist empire of Majapahit (King Brawijaya), who is said to have married a Muslim princess of Champa, and Islamic saints of the island (the saints of Ngampel and Giri, in the Surabaya region), whose aunt is said to have originated from Champa as well. These accounts appear in particular in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (History of Java), a text written between 1612 and 1836, widely known in Java and from which several episodes inspired Javanese painters and draftsmen. The wife of a third Islamic saint, in Cirebon (the saint of Gunung Jati), is also given as Chinese, under the name of Putri Ong Tien, and her tomb is still visited today by Sino-Indonesian pilgrims.

The Chinese princesses on glass are therefore both a distant echo of remarkable ladies of Chinese origin whose memory has remained alive through the centuries, and associated with a pictorial genre and type of composition to which they do not really belong, but which spread in the second half of the nineteenth century. Better acclimatized to Java than other Chinese themes, the Chinese princesses did not suffer the same ostracism during the regime of General Suharto.

In Bali (Thirty-two Items)

In regions of Balinese culture (the islands of Bali and Lombok[28]), the same paintings tell a slightly different story. Certainly, Bali also has a an historical-mythical character with the same name as in Java—*Putri Cina*—a princess of Chinese origin and married to a local ruler;[29] they form a couple who intervene in apotropaic rituals or exorcism.[30] But this Chinese princess is a middle-aged woman, physically far from the representations on glass that we are speaking about; the latter are also locally referred to as "Chinese Ladies" or "Chinese Maiden" (*Nyonya Cina* or *Nona Cina*) rather that Chinese princesses.

The oldest traces of these representations are to be found in the region of Singaraja, the main port on the north coast of the island. This coast passed under Dutch control in 1849, while the rest of the island retained its independence, and it opened up more quickly to the influences of the Dutch colony. Thus, in the last decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Singaraja and its region were the gateway and crucible for new ideas, fashions, and artistic practices, particularly in the fields of music and the performing arts,[31] but also in the plastic arts.[32] To this, let us add the presence of ancient and well-known Hokkien and Hainan Chinese communities from the nineteenth century onward, whose members were active in port administration, trade, and agriculture.[33]

As in Java, these Chinese Ladies were in vogue likely among the Balinese rather than the Chinese, particularly among the political-administrative and religious elites,[34] from the turn of the twentieth century. They were found in the early 1910s in a palace in the Singaraja region, for example, where eight small paintings frame the richly decorated entrance door of a pavilion (fig. 3). The size of these eight paintings is worth noting: it shows that from the beginning of what was a lasting fashion, alongside medium or large-sized pieces (up to 60 by 40 centimeters, see fig. 4), smaller formats circulated (30 by 20 centimeters), which are assumed to be more affordable. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in Bali more than in Java, glass remained a luxury and a rare product. Beyond the subject itself, these formats, as well as the concept of the framed and removable painting, contrast with the Balinese practices of the time, particularly the long horizontal cotton banners or large fixed wooden panels (walls, ceilings). The renewal of formats that had begun as early as the 1870s, as a consequence of the diffusion of paper as a new medium with limited dimensions, as well as commissions from Dutch amateurs, also led painters to gradually simplify their compositions.[35] The

3 Door decorated with sculptures and paintings, Singaraja (Bali, north coast), (in: Sinia 1913–1914, 39).

representations of Chinese Ladies are part of this renewal and the attractiveness of these new objects had to go hand in hand with the diffusion of new decorative uses for pictures.

During the 1930s, Chinese Ladies on glass circulated quite widely in Bali, at least in the north of the island, since it is by observing one of these pieces, sold by a Japanese dealer, that Jro Dalang Diah (ca. 1913?–2012), one of the greatest Balinese reverse glass painters of the twentieth century, says he learned his art.[36] The fashion continued until the 1960s, especially in palaces, with small formats similar to those in figure 3, displayed on the outside walls of residential pavilions or attached to finely carved wooden frames and placed as windows on the walls of the pavilion verandas.[37] The same paintings may have been used even longer and for more than purely decorative purposes, as shown in a Chinese Lady hanging from an offering-covered Hindu-Balinese altar that was photographed in the 1990s.[38]

These reuses, both of the support (one expects a window glass to be transparent and to let the light pass through, rather than occluding it) and of the subject (even if placing a Chinese Lady in front of an altar does not necessarily make it a representation of any deity), say enough about the freedom with which the reverse glass painters and, above

4 *Nyonya Cina* (Chinese Lady), n.d., reverse glass painting, 59×40 cm, Private Collection, Paris.

all, the Balinese amateurs seized these objects, which they must have considered fascinating (the material, the idea of China) and incredibly exotic to their eyes. Exotic, they were for two reasons. On the one hand, thematically, as painting in Bali was still exclusively religious and narrative, based on classical literary texts. On the other hand, stylistically, because Balinese painting was conceived as mere drawing enhanced with colors, and characterized by the complex juxtaposition of narrative scenes, the saturation of space, the absence of perspective, the use of flat colors, characteristics for some of them that were far removed from the Chinese canons. In short, these images of Chinese Ladies were hardly less exotic for Balinese (or Javanese) amateurs than, in other latitudes, for European amateurs, for whom the same export paintings were also intended.[39]

Most of the items listed were identified in the mid-1980s by Seichi Sasaki's research team; at that time and for fifteen years, an increasing number of these "antiques" were leaving private Balinese collections—amateurs who often held them firsthand—for abroad,[40] losing all local ties. With the help of distance, they are now simply "Chinese," although some of them were produced locally, for a local public, and in a sense, they are no less Balinese or Javanese.

5 *Putri Cina* (Chinese Princess), ca 1990s, reverse glass painting, 51.5 × 38 cm, Private Collection, Cirebon (Indonesia).

Chinese Ladies and the Revival of Javanese Reverse Glass Painting

The revival of reverse glass painting at the end of the 1970s resulted in an upturn of production of *Putri Cina*, now under the brush of Indonesian painters, mostly Javanese. This movement of artistic and cultural revivalism mixes several components among its promoters: institutional in the city of Cirebon, intellectual and cultural in Yogyakarta, and, more broadly in Java, commercial and touristic. The latter has been the main, if not the only, driving force behind the renewed success of the Chinese Ladies, while Javanese intellectuals were merely interested in representations linked to Javanese culture. However, the discovery and marketing of Chinese Ladies collected in Bali, combined with the prestige surrounding Chinese arts, seems to have generated a demand among foreign and Indonesian amateurs, which has been swamped by active painters since the 1980s. Thus, nearly half of the "Javanese" Chinese Ladies in the corpus are of recent origin and likely painted for a public made up of Westerners rather than Indonesians.

Among the Javanese painters who excavated this genre, the most active was probably Sulasno (1957) who produced a number of (unsigned) *Putri Campa*, as he called them, all characterized by the breast (inverted) and left arm visible through the robe, exploiting an erotic suggestion by the model from which his paintings originated (fig. 5).

6 Raden Saleh, *Srabad* (apotropaic figure), 1955, reverse glass painting, 38.5 × 27.5 cm, Museum Pangeran Cakrabuana, Cirebon, Indonesia.

Concluding Remarks: The Chinese Legacy in Cirebon

What is left of Chinese glass painting in Indonesia and where is its presence still noticeable? Most of the pieces are now inaccessible, in local or foreign collections, and, from a thematic point of view, the heritage is marginal. Nevertheless, there is one region of Java that both assumes a Chinese component of its identity and claims to be at the heart of reverse glass painting in Java, namely the city of Cirebon and its surroundings.

Cirebon's triple identity—Muslim, Javanese, and Chinese, as it is locally formulated and visually expressed through reverse glass painting, see figure 6—results partially of a construct elaborated in the 1970s and 1980s, although it is true that the Chinese community of Cirebon is ancient (the city is home to the oldest remaining Chinese temple in Java, *Tiao Kak Sie*/*Chao Jue Si* 潮覺),[41] Islam being a structuring element since the fifteenth century. As for the claim regarding reverse glass painting, it remains to be proven, but is widely accepted everywhere in Java. Local popular knowledge does not associate the introduction of reverse glass painting with China, but with Islam and the Middle East (most certainly wrongly); nevertheless, the Chinese stylistic and idiomatic contribution is fully recognized there, which for a long time was an exception in Indonesia. These are mainly two designs: rock gardens (Jav. *wadasan*) and clouds (usually in the form of piles, Jav. *megamendung*), as well as a certain type of color gradation (fig. 6 and 7). These borrowings are not unique to Cirebon and would easily be identified elsewhere in Java or in Bali, but they have been integrated into the local culture to the point where they now constitute a trademark that makes their

7 Rastika, *Kereta Singa Barong* (Cirebonese royal carriage), 1994, reverse glass painting, 49 × 58 cm, Private Collection, Cirebon, Indonesia.

presence indispensable on all reverse glass paintings produced in Cirebon, whatever the theme. If rock gardens and clouds no longer serve only to organize the pictorial space as it did in the past, they have also gained a remarkable autonomy of form and today are freely composed of varied compositions (fig. 7). In terms of themes, the Chinese Ladies remain strangely inconspicuous in Cirebon, but the recent part of the corpus of Chinese deities (e.g., the representations of Guanyin) was collected locally, produced by local painters to satisfy a demand from Sino-Indonesian amateurs.

Finally, it is also to this triple heritage, including its Chinese component, that Haryadi Suadi (1939–2016), a Cirebonese contemporary reverse glass painter, has drawn the most from.[42] This dedication deserves to be highlighted as Suadi paved the way for the recognition of "traditional" reverse glass painting and its entry into the painting academies and the faculty of fine arts in the 1970s and 1980s. The vague denomination of Suadi's floating *Dewi* (goddess, i.e., Guanyin; fig. 8), expresses the discomfort of a painter who could not then confess to drawing completely on Chinese heritage, but

8 Haryadi Suadi, *Dewi* (goddess), 1978, reverse glass painting, 72 × 52 cm, Galeri Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia.

the choice of this work to represent both Haryadi Suadi's art and contemporary Indonesian reverse glass painting at the National Gallery in Jakarta is a way of paying tribute to a contribution that is still alive and whose distant roots lie partly in eighteenth-century Chinese export paintings.

1 Van der Poel 2016.
2 Topsfield 1984–1985.
3 Patterson 2016.
4 Sasaki et al. 1987 and 1989.
5 The Dutch East India Company founded its first settlements in the Indonesian archipelago in 1605 (Ambon, South Moluccas) and 1619 (Batavia/Jakarta, West Java), but the Dutch colonial presence *stricto sensu* began in 1816 and ended in 1942.
6 See Samuel 2005.
7 Chaiklin 2003, 119; Viallé 2016, 303.
8 North 2014, 120–122.

9 The painters referred to by De Biervillas are the Chinese wives of Chinese inhabitants and apparently they were used to sell their paintings to foreigners at high prices (De Biervillas 1736, 18). I owe this reference to Claudine Salmon.
10 Kraus 2005, 72–76.
11 See http://maestroantikpurwokerto.blogspot.com/2010/10/lukisan-bangau-kaca.html (accessed on 18 August 2020).
12 Sasaki et al. 1987, 247.
13 Van der Poel 2016, 162.
14 Van der Poel 2016, 161.
15 Eliasberg 1978; Martimyanova in this volume.
16 Van der Poel 2016, 129–165.
17 In 1930, the Chinese communities or those of Chinese origin in the Netherlands Indies accounted for about 2% of the total population of the colony. This percentage has changed little over time (Beets et al. 2002, 25).
18 For instance *ziyou hunyin* 自由婚姻 ("free marriage", thus love marriage) and *yongyuan de ai* 永遠的愛 ("eternal love"), read on two paintings of the same studio (and undoubtedly of the same marriage), with frames also in a very modern taste. Readings Claudine Salmon and interpretation Yin Ker (pers. comm., September 2020): http://antikpraveda.blogspot.com/2012/06/lukisan-kaca-tua-oriental-1.html and http://antikpraveda.blogspot.com/2020/01/lukisan-kaca-peranakan.html (accessed on 18 August 2020).
19 Patterson 2016 and in this volume.
20 Song 2018.
21 Song 2018, 222.
22 Ibid., 223.
23 Salmon, pers. comm., September 2020.
24 Van der Poel 2016, 159–162.
25 Lee et al. 2015.
26 The figures often merge, and the two denominations are more or less interchangeable.
27 Reid 2000.
28 Lombok, immediately east of Bali, was dominated by Balinese nobility elites until it was conquered by the Dutch in 1894.
29 Salmon/Sidharta 2000, 91.
30 Gottowik 2010.
31 Cohen 2016, chap. 6.
32 Cooper 2005, 32–34.
33 Salmon/Sidharta 2000, 95, 98–100, 107–108.
34 For Lombok, the names of painting owners given by Sasaki are generally those of Balinese Brahmin priests (see also Sasaki et al. 1989, 202).
35 Vickers 2012, 99–100.
36 Jro Dalang Diah was born in Nagasepaha village, near Singaraja (Cooper 2005, 33).
37 For example, the palace of the Prince of Abianbase, Anak Agung Gde Payadnya, near Gianyar.
38 Wright 1994, 14. Unfortunately, the author says nothing about this altar.
39 Van der Poel 2016, 162.
40 Sasaki et al. 1989, 202.
41 Salmon 1973, 245. The temple, in its present state, dates from the end of the eighteenth century, but it is older. It is locally known as the Javanese temple of Dewi Velas Asih ("Goddess of Compassion"), which obviously refers to Guanyin.
42 Samuel 2008.

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PIONEERING RESEARCH
IN CHINESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTING

16

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHINESE REVERSE GLASS PAINTING

Thierry Audric

Abstract

Chinese reverse glass painting was born in Canton at the beginning of the eighteenth century. From that time until about 1850, this art form is linked to the commercial and cultural encounter between the West and China. It seduced Qianlong emperor and Chinese high society. In Europe, the aristocracy would acquire these paintings at great cost to decorate their homes or collect them. I have analyzed 681 paintings, their main motifs, Chinese or European, and for each work distinguished between Western and Chinese influences. This period of creating hybrid works is gradually being replaced by the transposition under glass of European or American engravings. Then the Opium Wars in 1840 and 1860 saw the end of the international character of this art form, which became exclusively Chinese.

Keywords

China, painting, glass, eighteenth century

The Dawn of Chinese Reverse Glass Painting

The inventory of gifts given to the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–1796) in 1722 and then in 1733 by eminent Cantonese figures contains the first mentions of glass mirrors painted with floral motifs.[1] These were paintings on large mirrors presented by European monarchs to the court of Peking (Beijing). Difficult and expensive to make in Europe, these were princely gifts. Thus, they were worthy of being offered to the emperor of China, and even more so as China did not yet know about flat glass at this time.

Mandarins in Canton who saw these mirrors arriving in their city asked local artisans to "sinicise" them, by decorating them with Chinese motifs, flowers, birds, trees, and rocks, before offering them to the court. But it was not only in order to personalize their gifts that these eminent Cantonese figures had them painted. It was also related to the role of the mirror in the Chinese and Western imagination.

Before the arrival of European mirrors, Chinese mirrors were bronze plates. They were seen to be of interest but were also regarded with a certain uneasiness and suspicion.[2]

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They were disturbing because they seemed like a window onto a world outside our own, and a trap for images. So that others could not be victims of these traps, mirrors which were no longer used in a room were turned toward the wall or the windows. The large mirrors sent to China had a completely different use in Europe. Designed for ceremonial rooms, they were turned inward toward the room, which had the effect of enlarging it and creating impressive "pictures within a picture." Versailles's gallery of mirrors is the apotheosis of this theatrical conception of the mirror. One can only imagine the perplexity and even anxiety of the Chinese dignitaries when faced with these spectacular gifts. Decorating mirrors with reverse glass painting might well have appeared to them a remarkable way of adapting them to Chinese culture, enabling them to be used while reducing the danger and threat they represented. In my opinion, this is one of the key reasons for the birth of this art form in China, to which we must add Emperor Qianlong's fondness for illusion.

Development of Chinese Reverse Glass Painting Market in China

Qianlong was so captivated by these works that he created a reverse glass painting workshop at the Imperial Palace, summoning reverse glass painters from Canton to the court and ordering Jesuit painter at his court, Jean-Denis Attiret (1702–1768), to paint on glass. In a letter (1741) the painter said:

> For over a year I have scarcely done anything else than paint on glass. A large number of beautiful large mirrors are brought from Europe, which the mandarins of Canton buy from the merchant ships and offer to the emperor.[3]

It was through this letter that West first caught wind of Chinese reverse glass painting. Unfortunately, in the course of my research, I have been unable to find any of these painted mirrors given to the emperor or painted in the Imperial Palace workshop in Beijing. Following the emperor, Chinese aristocracy, particularly that of Peking and Canton, welcomed reverse glass paintings on the walls of their beautiful homes (fig. 4).

Development of Chinese Reverse Glass Painting Market in Europe

Westerners on their way to Canton were also enthusiastic about these paintings. Supercargoes of East India Companies bought several and took them back to Europe to give as gifts or to sell. The oldest records of these arrivals in Europe I found date from 1738–1745. So painted mirrors set off to conquer Europe. Sweden was the first importer of these works, followed by England, France, the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent, Germany and Russia. Elie de Beaumont, (1732–1786) a French lawyer who visited the home of the former English Prime Minister, Robert Walpole (1676–1745), wrote in 1764 in his travel journal:

> The hothouses, the bird menagerie and particularly the pheasants from China are all very worthy of attention, but I particularly admired the mirrors sent from England to China and brought back with Chinese paintings done on the reverse of the mirror, with as much precision as if they had been done on the top.[4]

In studying numerous catalogues of auction sales in Paris, London, and Brussels of the eighteenth century, I observed that the prices of these works were very high, comparable to drawings by European painters like Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806). Why were these painted mirrors so successful in the West? Certainly, the exoticism of "chinoiserie" was in fashion and these glass paintings had the charm of an artistic meeting between China and the West. But I want to point out another important factor: the viewers can see themselves beside the Chinese motif and is thus able to enter this faraway world. Brother Attiret remarked on this when he wrote:

> This type of painting is all the more beautiful because, when seen from a short distance, it seems as if the figures, animals, landscape or any other design is not painted on the mirror but reflected; one's face can be seen in the gaps left by the painting, which makes for very attractive variety.[5]

This text was followed by this premonitory judgment: "This form of painting won't offend in Europe, especially if it is done in good taste."[6]
Several contemporary authors who have been interested in eighteenth-century Chinese glass painting have claimed that it was the Jesuits painters who taught this technique to Chinese painters. The above quote from Brother Attiret, and my careful examination of the texts written by the Jesuits at the imperial court, proved to me the opposite: it was the Chinese painters of Canton who taught this art to the Jesuits. Examination of the paintings themselves allowed me to formulate the hypothesis that the first Chinese glass painters were very probably from the workshops of painters on porcelain.[7]

The Artworks

I analyzed 681 Chinese reverse glass paintings from a variety of sources: public and private collections, sales in auction houses, in galleries, in antique shops, or from illustrations in books. The analysis of this corpus raised several highly specific questions for me. While there were no academic studies dedicated to Chinese glass painting, I could nevertheless refer to Carl Crossman's excellent book as well as those of David Howard and John Ayers, Jan Wirgin, Graham Child and catalogs, books, and articles of Patrick Conner. In these texts, reverse glass paintings only account for a small number of the objects studied. I therefore had to make several trial runs in various directions in order to find a rigorous method of analysis for all of the works in my corpus. I finally decided to analyze the paintings by origin of the main motif depicted, distinguishing Chinese motifs from Western ones. This method had the benefit of providing an understanding of how much interpenetration there was between Western and Chinese elements—a meeting of opposites that is one of the great virtues of reverse glass painting. This approach also had the advantage of enabling a certain chronology of artistic production to be established.

1 *Pheasants and Peonies*, circa 1750, reverse-mirror glass painting, 80 × 60 cm, Chinese pavilion Drottningholm Palace, Stockholm.

2 *Quails, Titmice, Magnolia and Camellia,* circa 1780, reverse-mirror glass painting, 148 × 81.5 cm.

I therefore categorized paintings by motifs: first the Chinese motifs: flowers and birds, outdoor scenes, beautiful women, and last, Western motifs, particularly the portraits of Westerners. And I distinguished a last category, not by its motif: direct transposition on glass of Western artworks.

Flowers and Birds

Flowers-and-birds motifs are traditional in Chinese painting. This type of motif was painted by Brother Attiret in the palace workshop and by Cantonese glass painters in the middle of eighteenth century. In the Chinese pavilion at Drottningholm Palace in Stockholm, Sweden, two large mirrors over the fireplaces have Chinese reverse glass paintings at the top. They form a pair, a golden pheasant, and a silver pheasant (fig. 1). Pheasants, which originated in China where they are a symbol of aristocracy, did not arrive in Europe until the mid-eighteenth century. Peonies, symbols of prosperity, are the national flower of China.

As is typical of Chinese nature paintings, there is an abundance of symbolism in the painting with its golden rococo frame (fig. 2). The camellia and magnolia flowers are of Chinese origin and were only really known and cultivated in the West from the eighteenth century onward. Both the camellia and magnolia symbolize springtime, youth, and happiness, and the two are often seen together in pairs of Chinese reverse glass

3 *Outdoor Scene, Music, Poetry,* circa 1760, reverse-mirror glass painting, 80 × 51.3 cm, Rijksmuseum.

paintings. The delicate white orchids, which found favor with Confucius, were often depicted in ink wash paintings and were the symbol of discreet friendship, love and beauty. The quail is a frequent motif because its Chinese name is a homophone of the word for peace or tranquility, so it naturally became a symbol for these.

Outdoor Scenes

Paintings in which members of the Chinese upper classes relax at the water's edge in their beautiful gardens are numerous in my corpus, and often come in pairs. Their dual themes tend to be those of winter and summer, interior and exterior, and music and poetry, as shown in the following examples. On a terrace by the water (fig. 3) a high-ranking Mandarin in winter clothing, a fur-lined hat and coat, plays traditional percussion instruments, while a young Manchu woman, sitting beside him, plays the pipa, a Chinese flute. A young Chinese girl, standing, accompanies them on the reed flute. The background is a large expanse of water, lined with beautiful Chinese villas and on which small pleasure sampans sail leisurely. The remaining unpainted part of the mirror forms the sky. This landscape, very typical of Cantonese reverse glass paintings, is inspired by that of the Pearl River, on the banks of which the holiday houses of the Cantonese upper classes were dotted at this period. Within this primarily Chinese image, two Western influences emerge: the linear perspective of the river—as Chi-

4 *Two Women in an Interior,* circa 1790, reverse glass painting, 39×52.5 cm, American Museum in Britain.

nese painters have a different way of depicting perspective—and the garlands. Chinese painters only depicted nature in a natural way, believing that it should not be compelled to follow rules in this way.

A reverse glass painting (fig. 4) depicts the interior of one of these beautiful Cantonese villas. We can see the river through the doors and windows, and there are pictures on the walls, which, judging by appearances, seem to be glass paintings, as they were the only paintings in China at this time that had solid frames.

Beautiful Women, Shepherdesses

Among the 681 reverse glass paintings that made up my corpus, the largest category is that of beautiful women. Within this category is another subgroup that was of particular interest to me, that of shepherdesses. Their common features are the sweet little round hat that is decorated with flowers and sometimes a feather and has two cords hanging down the side. They also wear a fabric belt, a white shawl covering their shoulders, and have a crook in their hand. The woman tends to be sitting on a rock at

5 *Shepherdess and Falconer,* circa 1770, reverse-mirror glass painting, 75 × 50 cm.

6 *Portrait of a Young Woman Dressed as a European Shepherdess*, circa 1750, oil painting on Korean paper, 126 × 66 cm, Imperial Palace Beijing.

the foot of a tree, surrounded by sheep (fig. 5). In the background, there is a lakeside landscape. These shepherdess paintings are either single paintings or one of a pair. If the young woman and the landscape are Chinese, the theme of "the pretty shepherdess keeping her sheep in the countryside" is European. Looking for the origin of these shepherdess I discover three interesting paintings. The first one is a silk painting,[8] attributed to Jesuit painter Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766). The scene unfolds in front of the Yuan Ming Yuan Belvedere Palace, part of the Summer Palace. In the foreground, Qianlong looks greedily at a pretty girl dressed similarly to our shepherdess: in a round hat and with a shawl over her shoulders. Two other paintings attributed to Castiglione are also reminiscent of our shepherdess. One is a painted paper, which can be found at the Imperial Palace in Beijing (fig. 6) and the other is a copy of this work on silk. These paintings depict a young person of the court and as the story—or perhaps the legend—goes, shows the beautiful Xiang Fei, the Uyghur mistress of Emperor Qianlong. By comparing this Castiglione painting to two "shepherdess reverse glass paintings" it is clear that Castiglione's work inspired them. The "shepherdess painting," accompanied by a romantic love story (concubine Xiang Fei), pleased both the

Chinese and the European, and has been very popular ever since. This comparison also proves the close ties that existed between Cantonese reverse glass painters and Imperial court painters.

Other Chinese Motifs

As well as these paintings of flowers, birds, outdoor scenes, and beautiful women, other motifs like the view of Canton's quayside emerged, or like portraits of important Chinese figures, landscapes, ceremonies and feasts, craftsmanship, musicians, still life, and religious pictures.

Western Motifs: Portraits of Westerners

Very soon, Western portraits appeared alongside these paintings with Chinese motifs, around the 1740s. During their stay in China, the officers and supercargoes of the East India Companies, who contributed to the spread of painted mirrors in Europe, went even further in developing this art: they had their portrait painted on glass.

Portraits of John Pike (dates unknown) and his wife (fig. 7) are the oldest portraits whose creation date we can be confident of, 1740 or 1741. John Pike was a supercargo for the Swedish East India Company. This painting is a beautiful meeting between China and the West. The Western influence is the model, John Pike, and his pose, his clothes, the depiction of his face using shadows—which the Chinese do not depict—and the portrayal of perspective of the body of water and the European binding of the book on the table. The Chinese influence is the water's edge landscape and the natural, symbolic elements. The tree with the white flowers is a fragrant Osmanthus tree, the scholar's tree, with the pheasants of the aristocracy perched on it, the fruit in the bowl on the table, the peaches, and some Buddha's hands—symbols of longevity and numerous descendants—and the narcissi, a symbol of prosperity.

The Chinese painter thus portrayed Pike as a cultured, important person, for whom long life, prosperity, and many descendants were hoped. These symbols probably escaped Pike, who likely saw in this only decoration and exoticism.

Reverse glass paintings in Europe and in China were generally anonymous, but a few of their painters were known. The most famous Chinese glass painter was a portraitist (particularly of Westerners, fig. 8), known in the West by the name of Spoilum (dates unknown). He painted from life, which was very rare for glass painters. This is confirmed by two passages from travel journals. One is the journal of John Meares: on his ship, the *Felice*, traveling from Canton to the United States in 1788, he was returning a Polynesian prince, by the name of Tianna, to the Hawaiian island from whence he had come. Among the many objects Tianna had bought in Canton was "a portrait of himself painted by the famous Chinese artist, Spoilum."[9] The other revealing quotation is in the journal belonging to Ralph Haskins of Roxbury (dates unknown), kept at Canton in 1802, who describes his session spent sitting for Spoilum in the following terms:

7 *Supercargo John Pike,* circa 1743, reverse-mirror glass painting, 104 × 62 cm, Sjöhistoriska museet, Stockholm.

8 *Portrait of Thomas Fry,* 1754, reverse-mirror glass painting, 38 × 25.4 cm.

> While nothing else could be done(!), I went to Spoilum and sat for two hours to have my portrait taken. He was $10 each and does a great deal of business in that line. I was surprised to see how expert he was in doing it.[10]

I tried as far as possible to understand the lives of the people whose portraits had been painted on glass, as well as those who had painted them. One of the most interesting is that of Andreas Everardus van Braam (1739–1801), supercargo of the famous Dutch East India Company. He had a Cantonese reverse glass painter paint a portrait of his wife made up of a skillful blend of carefully chosen engravings and miniatures.

Direct Transposition of Western Artworks

From the 1780s, the period of fully transposing European engravings onto glass began. Thus, it was the works of painters who were popular in the eighteenth century that were transposed onto glass, such as François Boucher (1730–1770) and Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792). However, engravings are in black and white, and the painter therefore had to invent colors. What should Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741–1825) have said about his famous *The Nightmare* (1781), a dramatic work due to its black and red colors and its

9 *The Nightmare*, 1810–50, reverse glass painting, 29 × 33 cm, Hélène and Thierry Audric Collection.

disturbing shadowy spaces, which became a vision in blue (fig. 9) under the paintbrush of the Chinese painter? We note that the copied engraving's inner frame, usually made of cardboard, was painted onto the glass. Lastly, the frame is a Chinese copy of the pearl-inlaid, Louis XVI style frames.[11]

The circulation of these engravings, reverse painted onto glass in Canton, was of such magnitude that in Europe, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, two German writers had the opportunity to see them and spoke of them in their writings. Thus, it was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) who, in one of his Venetian epigrams, described the reception of his novels throughout the world, and cites the Chinese reverse glass paintings based on the illustrations of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). I found these paintings and the original prints which are by Charles Knight (1791–1873) after paintings by James Northcote (1746–1831). In a book describing his voyage around the world, Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838) speaks of the dinner he had as Mr. Clark's guest on July 4, 1816. In Clark's cabin of the boat, he was able to view a Chinese reverse glass painting of Madame Récamier (1777–1849), whom he had met in Europe at the home of Madame de Staël (1766–1817).[12] He mentions that these portraits were frequently seen on American ships. I discovered Richard Cosway's (1742–1821) painting at the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, depicting Madame Récamier

during her stay in London in 1801, and a picture of a transposition of it. Without any doubt it is the portrait seen by Chamisso.
The reverse glass portraits of George Washington (1732–1799), "copies" made in Canton of painting by Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828) triggered two controversies in the United States. The first one, in the early nineteenth century, was about whether such a reverse glass copy of a painted work is a fake, a forgery, or whether it could be compared to a print after a painting. The related question, raised at the end of the twentieth century was: Does this reverse glass painting have a place in an American museum?[13]

The Influence of Chinese Reverse Glass Painting Spread beyond China

Indian aristocrats, who saw the Chinese reverse glass paintings that the English upper classes had ordered when the British East India Company ships stopped over in India on their way home, began to take an interest in this artform in the 1770s. They then started to send their engravings to be transposed onto glass in Canton. Soon after this, Chinese painters were invited to India, resulting in the birth of Indian reverse glass painting, which became a popular art form that is still flourishing today. We also find reverse glass painting in the Indochinese peninsula and Indonesia.

From an International Aristocratic Art to a Chinese Popular Art

The golden age of Cantonese reverse glass painting ended when the First Opium War broke out in 1840. The time was no longer right for this cultural meeting, observation, and this trend of reciprocity. Increasing trade profits became the West's only concern, Chinese reverse glass painting was no longer in fashion in Europe, but nevertheless, it did not disappear. It became (what a transformation!) a purely Chinese popular art form that is still thriving today.

1 Palace. Miscellaneous Objects Presentation List, 1277. *China First Historical Archives*. Quoted by Boda 1987, 41.
2 Interview at Tianjin in 2007 with Feng Jicai, writer, founder, and director of the Tianjin popular arts museum.
3 Gazier 1911, 15.
4 De Beaumont 1895, 144–145.
5 Gazier 1911, 15.
6 Gazier 1911, 15.
7 Audric 2020, 30.
8 Tokyo National Museum 1964.
9 Meares 1794, 228.
10 Quoted by Crossman 1991, 49.
11 See the contribution of Elisabeth Eibner in this volume.
12 Von Chamisso 2012.
13 This phenomenon has been discussed in detail in this volume by Karina Corrigan in her chapter "The Governor of Surat and the Apotheosis of Washington: Cantonese Reverse Glass Paintings for Early Nineteenth-century American Markets."

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17

SOME STYLES IN NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINESE GLASS PAINTING
A FIRST APPROACH

Rupprecht Mayer

Abstract

This paper discusses reverse glass paintings produced for the Chinese market in the last decades of the Qing dynasty, in the time of the Republic and in the 1950s. An attempt is made to describe seven groups of paintings according to their stylistic characteristics. Published and unpublished images from the Mei Lin Collection are used for this purpose. Due to the lack of traffic infrastructure in China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we can assume that glass paintings of a certain place of production were rarely sold nationwide. This means the emergence of regional styles. Some styles can be traced back to a well-known glass painter. However, it can be assumed that successful productions generated competition and imitators on the same regional market.

Keywords

Reverse glass painting, vernacular art, regional styles

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, many reverse glass paintings in China left private homes and appeared on the antique's market. During this process they usually passed the hands of several dealers, so that date and region of their production is often obscure.

This paper attempts to define different regional groups of glass paintings based on stylistic characteristics. Wooden framing and the features of the glass sheets used could, of course, also be classifying elements, but they are not discussed here.

The glass paintings reviewed here come exclusively from the Mei Lin Collection, which covers glass paintings from approximately 1840 to 1965, mainly from the Huabei (華北) and Dongbei(東北) regions, i.e., from the provinces of Shanxi (山西), Shandong(山東), Hebei (河北), and Liaoning (遼寧), and the cities of Beijing(北京) and Tianjin (天津). Before the railroad network became denser in the first decades of the twentieth century, transport in northern China depended mainly on wheelbarrows, which were not suitable to carry fragile goods like glass paintings. For this reason, glass paintings

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1 *A Lady with a Fur Cap*, ca. 1920, reverse glass painting, 25 × 19 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

were not distributed over large distances. They served the needs of local populations and answered to their taste and traditions. While in different regions artistic style had local characteristics, the motifs depicted in the paintings mostly belonged to the shared realm of Han-Chinese folklore.

Some styles can be traced back to a well-known glass painter, as in the case of Wu Baozhen (吳葆貞) from Laizhou (萊州) in the Shandong province. However, it can be assumed that successful productions generated competition and imitators in the regional market. Below, I will try to describe seven distinctive styles of Chinese vernacular glass painting as a first step.

"Miniature Ladies Style"

This style is represented by small format (ca. 22 by 16 centimeters) paintings of women in stylish costumes (fig. 1). The women are shown as half-length figures, usually in three-quarter profile. They have white faces with a rosy hue around the eyes. The facial features are drawn with golden and black lines; of note are also high collars and elaborate headdresses characteristic for the fashion of the years after 1911.[1] The fur hat is typical for northern China. They probably originate from the Liaoning province.

2 *A Lady Reading,* 1915–1925, reverse glass painting, 40×29 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

"Fall of the Folds Style"

This style (fig. 2) emphasizes the falls of the garments' folds with delicate shapes and shading. The depicted women have a rosy hue on the faces. The chin is also emphasized in outline and structure. A special attention is given to comparatively realistic shapes of the ear lobes. The lips have a red spot in the center. We can note a frequent use of mirror surface in these works. Some of the paintings are signed by Li Yunting (李雲亭), Liu Yulin (劉玉麟), and Ziyang (子揚, i.e., Gao Ziyang [高子陽]), but many others are anonymous.[2] These painters were active in eastern Hebei in the 1920s and early 1930s and their production was probably also sold in Beijing and Tianjin.

"Cartoon Style"

In this group of images (fig. 3), the facial features of the figure and even the horse are drawn as black outlines on a white or light-colored surface. The jagged contours of trees are also characteristic for this type. The graphical style resembles in its simplicity modern cartoons. The illustration here shows a young man who was successful in his examinations and returns with honors to his home, which is symbolized by the well. One of the boys carries silk bolts, symbolizing the future riches of the official, another one carries a parasol, which also served as a fan.

3 *Coming Home after Succeeding in the Exams* (digitally repaired image), ca. 1900, reverse glass painting, 53 × 73 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

"Rosy Cheeks Style"

In this style we find figures with white faces with a pink hue on the cheeks and in the area between eye and eyebrow (fig. 4). The figures are also characterized by fine eyebrows drawn high above the eyes, delicately shaped lips, and large fleshy ears. White highlights have been added on lips, noses, and lids. Sometimes curled hair is falling on the forehead of women. Most paintings have mirror surfaces, leaving wide areas empty.[3] Some glass paintings of this style were found in Liaoning, but it is too early to define this province as their place of origin.

"Laizhou Style"

This style can be traced back to Wu Baozhen (吳葆貞) from Laizhou (萊州, Shandong). According to Wei, he was born around 1872 and worked as a painter at the court until the last years of the Qing (清) dynasty.[4] Later, he established a glass and mirror shop in Laizhou. He was active in Laizhou until the last years of the 1930s, when he went to Harbin (哈爾濱) and died there. However, many aspects of his biography remain unclear. He had three apprentices and presumably also competitors in the same city. Most of the glass paintings bearing his style are not signed. Here ,we should probably speak of the Laizhou style or the style of Wu Baozhen and his school (fig. 5). The main

4 *Playing the Flute to Attract a Phoenix* (detail), ca. 1900, reverse glass painting, 42 × 32 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

5 *The Mythical Ruler Yu after Capturing of the Flood Demon Wuzhiqi*, ca. 1920–30, reverse glass painting, 54 × 74 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

characteristic of his oeuvre is the use of large mirror surfaces, structured by a few lines and objects, which create a three-dimensional impression with economic means. The figures wear richly decorated robes, which are executed in painstaking and colorful detail. Golden outlines are used extensively. Background details are kept to a minimum, similarly to a stage background of the Peking opera. Favorite subjects in this style of glass painting are scenes from novels and dramas (especially from the "Romance of

6 *The Fight between Dong Zhuo and Lü Bu Because of the Beautiful Diaochan*, from the *Sanguo yanyi* cycle, ca. 1910, reverse glass painting, 27 × 20 cm. Mei Lin Collection.

the Three Kingdoms" or *Sanguo yanyi* (三國演義) cycles) and auspicious mythological scenes. Still life imagery is painted occasionally, while landscapes, flowers, and birds are rare.[5]

"Red and Green Style"

In this group only six primary colors are used, namely red, green, blue, yellow, black, and white, with an addition of brown (fig. 6). Linear drawing is frequently employed. White or pink faces of the figures have facial features drawn in brown, gold, or black outlines. Small formats were often used for the decoration of trays, as seen in the illustration here (fig.6).[6] I show a scene from the "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" or *Sanguo yanyi* (三國演義) cycle: Dong Zhuo (董卓) attacks Lü Bu (呂布), whom he found flirting with his beloved Diaochan (貂蟬). The border surrounding the scene appears on almost all tea trays. Many works of the "red and green" style originate from Shandong, but there might be other regions of origin involved as well.

"Neck Wrinkles Style"

In the paintings from this group the colors of the skin of the figures varies from light salmon to pink (fig. 7). Almost all figures show wrinkles on their neck. The shapes are

7 *A Child Receives Medicine from a Goddess*, 1900–30, reverse glass painting, 27×23 cm, Mei Lin Collection.

often bizarre and hyperbolized. They are frequently painted on blue ground.[7] This style can be attributed to the Shanxi region.

Conclusion

These observations can only help us to roughly group some works of Chinese reverse glass paintings together, with the hope of being able to attribute the works to certain masters, schools or regions of origin. Other criteria would be the quality and the dimensions of the glass sheets as well as the structure of the wooden frames and the rear boards. In the beginning of 2021, a group of Chinese collectors has organized itself on the Chinese social media platform WeChat, among them Zhao Bolin (赵柏林), the collector of glass paintings from eastern Hebei and author of *Zhongguo Pingban Bolihua* 中国平板玻璃画 (Chinese Plate Glass Paintings).[8] Since most of the collections are unpublished, this kind of exchange is an encouraging first step.

1 Cf. Mayer 2017–18, pl. 60–63.
2 Cf. Mayer 2017–18, pl. 1, 2, 9, 39–45, 47, 55, 65, 74–77, 81, 115, 117.
3 Cf. Mayer 2017–18, pl. 127–129.
4 Wei 2010.
5 Cf. Mayer 2017–18, pl. 6, 8, 27 67–71, 73, and numerous plates in Wei 2010.

6 Cf. Mayer 2017–18, pl. 114, 118, 119, 124, 125.
7 Cf. Mayer 2017–18, pl. 86–89, 101.
8 Zhao/Liu 2006.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF AUTHORS

Elisa Ambrosio M.A. studied art history and sociology at the Universities of Basel and Fribourg. She has been a scientific collaborator at the Vitrocentre Romont since 2014 and curator at the Vitromusée Romont since 2018, where she combines research and museum activity. As a specialist in reverse glass painting, she has co-curated and curated several temporary exhibitions at the Vitromusée Romont, either thematically (*Venini & C. Le génie verrier à Murano*, 2018; *Reflets de Chine. Trois siècles de peinture sous verre chinoise*, 2019/20; *La redécouverte de la couleur (Section : Couleur et art verrier au Bauhaus)*, 2020/21) (selection), or about Swiss and foreign artists.

Thierry Audric left his position as associate professor in geology at the École nationale supérieure des mines in Paris in 1977 to start a career as cultural and scientific cooperation counsellor at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His duties led him to live nearly twenty years in Asia, four of which were in China, where he discovered the fascinating beauty of Chinese reverse glass painting. In 2007, he decided to research this art, and discovered that it was born in the eighteenth century in Canton, from an artistic encounter between China and the West. Eager to make this art more widely known and appreciated, he defended a PhD dissertation titled *Chinese Reverse Glass Painting 1720–1820*, in 2016 at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland.

Jan van Campen studied history of art at Leiden University, obtaining a PhD in 2000. He worked for auction house Bubb Kuyper, the Dutch national museum for ceramics, Princessehof, Leeuwarden, and is currently the curator of Asian export art in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. His main interest is the collection history of Asian art in the Netherlands of the sixteenth to twentieth centuries.

Kee Il Choi Jr. earned a master's in the history of art from Williams College. In 2017, after a hiatus of forty years, he resumed the pursuit of a PhD and is now a doctoral

candidate at the University of Zurich. During the interim, he enjoyed a career as an art consultant specializing in Chinese export art. His institutional clientele included the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. Recent publications include, "Partly Copies from European Prints: Johannes Kip and the Invention of Export Landscape Painting in Eighteenth-century Canton," *Rijksmuseum Bulletin* (Autumn 2018) and "Ornament from China: Sources for a Garden Folly Design by Jean-Jacques Lequeu," *The Burlington Magazine* (March 2020). Since April of 2020, he has served as the founding moderator of *Global Interchange: A Virtual Forum*.

Patrick Conner was Keeper of Fine Art at the Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton, England from 1975 to 1986. Since 1986, he has been director of the Martyn Gregory Gallery, London, specialists in historical paintings related to the China Trade. Conner's published books include *Oriental Architecture in the West* (1979), *George Chinnery, Artist of India and the China Coast* (1993), *The Hongs of Canton – Western Merchants in South China 1700–1900* (2009), and *Paintings of the China Trade* (2013). He has curated a number of loan exhibitions exploring the relationships between "Eastern" and "Western" cultures, including *William Alexander – A British Artist in Imperial China* (Brighton and Nottingham University, 1982), *The China Trade 1600–1860* (Brighton, 1986), *Impressions of the East: The Art of George Chinnery* (Hong Kong Museum of History, 2005), and *The Flamboyant Mr. Chinnery* (Asia House, London, 2011–12).

Karina H. Corrigan is the Associate Director – Collections and H. A. Crosby Forbes Curator of Asian Export Art at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, where she has worked since 1997. Karina has organized ten exhibitions drawn from PEM's notable collections of cross-cultural art from China, Japan, and South Asia, including *Asia in Amsterdam: The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age* with colleagues from the Rijksmuseum, the Sean M. Healey Gallery for Asian Export Art in PEM's new wing, and *Power and Perspective: Early Photography in China*, co-organized with Stephanie H. Tung.

Elisabeth Eibner is an East Asian Art History master's candidate at the University of Zurich. She previously graduated with a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Oxford. Her area of special interest lies in the research of the objects of Chinese art history that combine Eastern and Western elements.

Danielle Elisseeff (born 1938) has graduated from Ecole nationale des chartes, Paris in 1964 and has received a doctorate degree in Far Eastern studies from Paris VII in 1981. She was also a graduate of INALCO (in Chinese, 1964) and Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE, Paris, IV^{e} section, 1965). From 1982 to 2004 Danielle Elisseeff has worked as an editor-in-chief of the *Revue bibliographique de sinologie* (Paris,

EHESS). She has also taught archaeology and the arts of China at the École du Louvre, Paris in 1983–2010. Currently she serves as a permanent member of the Center for Studies on Modern and Contemporary China, Paris (EHESS) and a corresponding member (5th section) of the Académie des Sciences d'Outre-Mer (ASOM), Paris.

Patricia F. Ferguson, a former Project Curator, Britain, Europe and Prehistory, British Museum, has a master's in archaeology from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, and has since 2011 acted as the adviser on ceramics to the National Trust, having also worked as a consulting curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Ferguson's publications include *Pots, Prints and Politics: Ceramics with an Agenda, 1450–1950* (London: British Museum Research Publication, 2021), *Ceramics: 400 years of British Collecting in 100 Masterpieces* (London: PWP, 2016), and *Garnitures: Vase Sets from National Trust Houses* (London: V&A Publishing, 2016).

Francine Giese is director of the Vitrocentre and the Vitromusée Romont, Switzerland. From 2014 to 2019 she held a SNSF professorship at the Institute of Art History of the University of Zurich, where she led the research project "Mudejarismo and Moorish Revival in Europe". Her PhD thesis, dealing with the Islamic ribbed vault, was published in 2007 (Gebr. Mann), and her habilitation (second book) on building and restoration practices in the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba was issued in 2016 (Peter Lang). In her current research project "Luminosity of the East" (SNSF, 2020–2024), she investigates the typology, materiality, and provenance of Islamic colored glass windows (*qamarīyāt*) within Western museum collections. Her research focuses on transfer and exchange processes between the Islamic world and the West, architectural Orientalism, provenance research, and the arts of glass.

Lihong Liu is Sally Michelson Davidson Assistant Professor of Chinese Arts and Cultures in the Department of History of Art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her research areas include Chinese painting and calligraphy of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911), material culture in early modern world, arts of the Silk Routes, and theories and methodologies of eco-critical art history. Liu earned her doctorate from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University.

William H. Ma is a Chinese art historian who specializes in the artistic exchanges between China and the world in the late-imperial and modern periods. His research interest includes material culture, workshop practices, aesthetic pedagogy, Jesuit missionary art, and the relationship between export art and the imperial court during the High Qing. Ma received two bachelor's degrees (integrative biology and history of art, 2006) and a PhD (history of art, 2016) from the University of California, Berkeley. A former Mellon Curatorial Fellow at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, Ma has also worked at the Las Vegas Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum

of Art, the Guggenheim-Hermitage Museum, and the University of California Museum of Paleontology. He is currently conducting field and archival research on the intersection between surface, space, and material culture of the Nguyen dynasty in collaboration with an international team of interdisciplinary scholars in Hue, Vietnam. This is part of Site and Space in Southeast Asia, funded primarily through the Getty Foundation's Connecting Art Histories initiative.

Alina Martimyanova studied at the Kyiv National Linguistics University, Ukraine, the Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, China, and at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. She holds a master's degree in East Asian art history and classical Sinology from the University of Zurich and currently works on a dissertation about Chinese print culture in the late nineteenth century.

Christopher L. Maxwell is the Samuel and M. Patricia Grober Curator in the Department of the Applied Arts of Europe at the Art Institute of Chicago. Until 2022, he was Curator of Early Modern Glass at the Corning Museum of Glass. He earned his PhD from the University of Glasgow in 2014. In addition, he holds an MPhil from the University of Glasgow and a master's from the University of London. His most recent publication, *In Sparkling Company: Reflections on Glass in the 18th-Century British World*, was published by The Corning Museum of Glass, New York, in 2020. Maxwell has previously held curatorial positions at The Royal Collection Trust and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Rupprecht Mayer together with his wife Haitang Mayer-Liem, collected Asian works of art, especially Chinese and SE-Asian export ceramics found in Indonesia and Chinese reverse glass paintings of the 19th and 20th century. After studying Sinology and East Asian art history in Munich and Taipei, he worked as a literary translator, as a lecturer of Chinese, and as an interpreter. He has traveled extensively and stayed in Taiwan, China, and Indonesia. He lives in Burghausen in retirement.

Jessica Lee Patterson got her doctorate in the history of art from the University of California, Berkeley, and teaches in the Department of Art, Architecture + Art History at the University of San Diego. She studies the impact of Chinese immigration and trade on the design and decoration of Buddhist temples in Bangkok in the nineteenth century. Patterson's work navigates the complex spaces where art and religion intersect. She is particularly interested in how the structure and use of such spaces are conditioned by cultural difference, such as encounters between Thai and Chinese, elites and commoners, or modernity and its antecedents.

Rosalien van der Poel held a PhD position at the Graduate School for Humanities at Leiden University, affiliated with the Leiden University Centre for Arts in the Society, from 2010 to 2016. Currently, she combines her job as institute manager of the Acade-

my of Creative and Performing Arts at Leiden University with her position as a research associate China at the National Museum of World Cultures/Museum Volkenkunde and as board member of the Royal Asian Art Society in the Netherlands. With her profound knowledge of Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections, she emphatically advocates the significant value of these collections.

Michaela Pejčochová is a Czech scholar specialising in Chinese art and the theory of art in China. She has been working as curator of the Chinese art collections at the National Gallery Prague for almost twenty years and has published its unique collection of modern Chinese ink painting in 2008 as *Masters of 20th-Century Chinese Ink Painting from the Collections of the National Gallery in Prague*. Most recently, she has completed the monograph *Emissary from the Far East: Vojtěch Chytil and the Collecting of Modern Chinese Painting in Interwar Czechoslovakia*.

Jérôme Samuel is an "Indonesianist," specialized in two unrelated research fields and disciplines. The first one is sociolinguistics, mainly language and terminological policy in the Malay-speaking world, now interested in mutual intelligibility between standard Malays. The second one is art history, mainly reverse glass painting as a popular art in colonial Java, which he has investigated in depth over the past fifteen years. He also teaches Indonesian language and culture at Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, Paris, and to this end he has developed his own linguistic teaching method. As a researcher, he was affiliated with the Centre Asie du Sud-Est, Paris. He is currently director of the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (Institut de Recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est, IRASEC), in Bangkok.

Hans Bjarne Thomsen has held the chair for East Asian art history at the University of Zurich since 2007. Born in Kyoto, Japan, he was raised in Japan, Denmark, and the US. He received his PhD in Japanese art history and archaeology from Princeton University and has taught at the University of Chicago and other institutions. He has collaborated with museums on survey and exhibition projects and has curated several exhibitions. In 2019, he received the Order of the Rising Sun for furthering the cultural bonds between Switzerland and Japan. Publications center mostly on topics related to Japanese woodblock prints and collection histories.

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