

**Agents of Cooperation or Competition: Exploring the Object Biographies  
of the Qianlong Emperor's First Copperplate Battlescapes**

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Hybridity, enchantment, secrecy, power, appropriation – these terms are central to the biography of an extremely important example of cross-cultural collaboration between High Qing China and late eighteenth-century France; a copperplate print series known as *The East Turkestan Campaign*.<sup>1</sup> The series was commissioned by the Qianlong emperor (ruled 1736-95) to celebrate his three successful campaigns against the Mongols in the border regions of the empire from 1755-1759. The engravings were created in France after the model drawings made by Jesuit artists at the emperor's court, which in turn were reductions of their earlier wall paintings. The engravings were sent back to China from France, along with a printing press, enabling the Chinese imperial artisans to master the foreign technology. This essay will examine these *Campaign* prints' biographies through looking at their inspiration, travel, creation, reception and legacies, uncovering how the Qianlong emperor used secrecy and diplomacy in their creation and style to symbolically bolster his dominance within his empire and on the world stage.

The Manchu Emperor Qianlong was the most innovative and influential ruler of the High Qing era. Faced with an extremely heterogeneous population and the charge that his Manchu heritage meant he was not entirely Chinese, he focused on the Confucian aspiration of promoting collaborations across cultures.<sup>2</sup> The emperor's collecting habits and fusions of styles can be seen as politically essential acts, symbolically containing and mastering the vast diversity of cultural identities within his empire and sphere of influence through art.<sup>3</sup> The European Jesuit artists at his court and their Chinese apprentices acted within this orbit of power, creating many artistic examples of Chinese and European hybridity, or 'euroiserie', to add to an already eclectic

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<sup>1</sup> Niklas Leverenz, 'Drawings, Proofs and Prints from the Qianlong Emperor's East Turkestan Copperplate Engravings', *Arts Asiatiques* 68 (2013): 39.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Hay, 'Foreword', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and the West*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu, Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles, California: Getty Research Institute, 2015), vii; Kristina Kleutghen, 'Staging Europe: Theatricality and Painting at the Chinese Imperial Court', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 42, no. 1 (2013): 81, 88; Marcia Reed, 'Imperial Impressions: The Qianlong Emperor's Print Suites', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and the West*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu, Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles, California: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 124.

<sup>3</sup> Marco Musillo, 'Bridging Europe and China: The Professional Life of Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766)' (PhD thesis, Norwich, University of East Anglia, 2006), 36.

imperial collection.<sup>4</sup> The Chinese understanding of European cultures was transmitted primarily through prints brought by these missionaries, as it was easier to disseminate knowledge through artworks than through text, and prints were easily transportable.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the emperor's commissioning of these *Conquest* prints from France of Chinese subject matter drawn by European Jesuits can be seen as an appropriation of European printing techniques and knowledge, subsuming Europe within the Qing sphere of influence.

The origins of these *Conquest* prints' style and compositions may have been European engravings of military scenes, such as those after Adam Frans van der Meulen's battlescapes of Louis XIV's conquests in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 1). Van der Meulen's prints may have been included in the *Cabinet de Rois* collection sent to the Chinese emperor by Louis XIV (1638-1742), and so would have been familiar to the Qianlong emperor and the European missionaries.<sup>6</sup> These prints and the *Conquest* prints employ a similar European perspective and modeling, using panoramic views of battles with naturalistic figures, rather than the Chinese traditional bird's-eye perspective or close-up views of fighting with highly stylized figures in an undefined pictorial space.<sup>7</sup> For instance, the second print of the *Conquest* series, *The Storming of Gädän Ola*, shows the heroic moment when the Kalmyk General Ayusi, allied with the Qing army, attacked the Dzungar rebel forces at their camp in the middle of the night and defeated them, gaining control of Tianshan Mountain (Fig. 2).<sup>8</sup> Linear perspective can be seen through narrow, rock-lined paths

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<sup>4</sup> Claudia Brown, *Great Qing: Painting in China, 1644-1911*, China Program Books (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 63; Hay, 'Foreword', x.

<sup>5</sup> Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu and Ning Ding, 'Introduction', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and the West*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu, Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles, California: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Evelyn S. Rawski, *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, ed. Jessica Rawson and Evelyn Sakakida Rawski (London: Royal Academy of Arts, exhibition catalogue, 2005), 407; Ya-Chen Ma, 'War and Empire: Images of Battle during the Qianlong Reign', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and the West*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu, Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles, California: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 167; Nick Pearce, 'Qianlong's Western Campaign Engravings', in *Imagining Qianlong, Louis XV's Chinese Emperor Tapestries and Battle Scene Prints at the Imperial Court in Beijing*, ed. Florian Knothe (University Museum and Art Gallery, University of Hong Kong, 2017), 52.

<sup>7</sup> Ma, 'War and Empire: Images of Battle during the Qianlong Reign', 159.

<sup>8</sup> Cheng Wing-cheong and National Palace Museum Production Crew, 'The Victory in the Pacification of Dzungars and Muslims - Final Prints', *Documenting Victory in Etching* (blog), accessed 10 November 2023, [https://theme.npm.edu.tw/etching/official\\_en.html](https://theme.npm.edu.tw/etching/official_en.html).

in the foreground delineating the route of the cavalry as they advance towards the fighting scenes taking place in the middle ground, while the diminutive Qing army pursues the fleeing enemy in the background. Such perspectival verisimilitude, shared with Van der Meulen's battle prints, was declared "impressive, remarkable, and unprecedented" by the Emperor's officials, reflecting their wonder not only at the mathematics involved in creating such illusions of distance, but also of the copperplate prints themselves.<sup>9</sup> As Alfred Gell has theorized, this 'enchantment of technology' which transcends the viewer's understanding can imbue that object with an almost magical aura, as the technology of copperplate printing and perspectival drawing appeared alien to Chinese artistic traditions.<sup>10</sup>

However, Ya-Chen Ma has argued that the engravings, far from being purely European in conception, actually demonstrate a mixing of European and Chinese forms of war representations. He finds a more convincing source in *The Pictorial Veritable Records of Taizu*, commissioned to commemorate the founder of the Qing Empire (Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> Despite stylistic differences, the content is very similar between these woodcuts and the later copperplates. Both include scenes of collecting spoils of war, gathering supplies, containing captives, camping, and the reserve forces, while delineating clear divisions between ranks of the army, and between the Qing army and their enemies.

The compositions of the *Campaign* prints started life in 1760 as enormous wall paintings, created by four missionary artists: the Italian Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766) (responsible for the design of *The Storming of Gädän Ola*), the Bohemian Ignatius Sichelbart (1708-80), the Frenchman Jean-Denis Attiret (1702-68), and the Italian Giovanni Damasceno Sallusti (d. 1781).<sup>12</sup> These sixteen wall paintings, each measuring approximately 4 x 9 metres, were hung in

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<sup>9</sup> Ma, 'War and Empire: Images of Battle during the Qianlong Reign', 162.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Gell, 'The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology', in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40-63.

<sup>11</sup> Ma, 'War and Empire: Images of Battle during the Qianlong Reign', 167.

<sup>12</sup> Tanya Szrajber, 'The "Victories" of the Emperor Qianlong', *Print Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2006): 30.

the ‘Hall of Purple Splendour’, the symbolic military centre of the Qing empire.<sup>13</sup> In 1764, after seeing the battle prints by the Augsburg engraver Georg Philippe Rugendas (1666-1743), the emperor ordered that the four missionary artists reduce the enormous paintings into very detailed model drawings that measured roughly 60 x 90 cm, which would be transported to France to be made into engravings there.<sup>14</sup> These drawings have not survived, and only a couple of fragments of the wall paintings are extant, but by comparing the prints to these fragments it appears that the emperor considered the exceptional artistry and almost magical qualities of the foreign technology of copperplate engraving to be commensurable to the precious materials of the paintings (including gold characters on quivers, used to identify the generals) (Figs. 4 and 5).<sup>15</sup>

Only four of the drawings would be transported on the first trip from the Chinese port of Canton to France, including the model drawing for *The Storming of the Camp at Gādān Ola*.<sup>16</sup> The ship they were on departed Canton in January 1766 and only arrived in France in August.<sup>17</sup> An awareness of the treacherous crossing can be seen in the Chinese Hong merchant’s contract with the French Compagnie des Indes, which stated that an immediate advance of 5,000 taels of silver would be given, which would cover any accidents that may occur in transit.<sup>18</sup> The remaining twelve model drawings were transported the next year, sent in sets of four placed in ‘calyx’ boxes on three different vessels, to limit potential disasters at sea.<sup>19</sup> The contract also

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the wall paintings and their location see Kristina Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces*, Art History Publication Initiative (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 143–44; Chuimei Ho, *Splendors of China’s Forbidden City: The Glorious Reign of Emperor Qianlong* (London: Merrell, 2004), 116; Niklas Leverenz, ‘From Painting to Print, The Battle of Qurman from 1760’, *Orientalia* 41, no. 4 (May 2010): 50–51; Leverenz, ‘Drawings, Proofs and Prints from the Qianlong Emperor’s East Turkestan Copperplate Engravings’, 40–41; Szrajber, ‘The “Victories” of the Emperor Qianlong’, 30–31; Clarissa Von Spee, ed., ‘Printing at Court’, in *The Printed Image in China: From the 8th to the 21st Centuries* (London: British Museum Press, 2010), 119.

<sup>14</sup> Pearce, ‘Qianlong’s Western Campaign Engravings’, 52; Szrajber, ‘The “Victories” of the Emperor Qianlong’, 29–30, 32; Takata Tokio, ‘The Qianlong Emperor’s Copperplate Engravings of the “Conquest of Western Regions”’, *Memoirs of the Research Department of The Toyo Bunko* 70 (1 January 2012): 5.

<sup>15</sup> Leverenz, ‘From Painting to Print, The Battle of Qurman from 1760’, 51–52.

<sup>16</sup> Szrajber, ‘The “Victories” of the Emperor Qianlong’, 32–34.

<sup>17</sup> Leverenz, ‘Drawings, Proofs and Prints’, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Szrajber, ‘The “Victories” of the Emperor Qianlong’, 35.

<sup>19</sup> Szrajber, 42.

specified that the prints and their matrices should be separated on different ships for the return journey, presumably for the same insurance reason.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the necessity for speed being repeatedly emphasised in the emperor's edict, Castiglione's letter, and the Hong contract that accompanied the model drawings to France, it would take a total of nine years before all the prints and their matrices were returned to China, as the extreme complexity of the prints meant they took an unusually long time to create.<sup>21</sup> The 'birth' of these engravings demonstrates an intense negotiation between cultural practices and expectations, as Castiglione's letter accompanying the Emperor Qianlong's edict declared that "the artist in charge of the engravings should conform exactly to the original... they must convey the most exquisite delicacy and gracefulness... with precision and exactitude."<sup>22</sup> Such focus on meticulous copying and fidelity to the original proved something of a challenge to the French engravers, used to representing the broad brush-strokes and grandiose poses so prominent in contemporary French paintings.<sup>23</sup> Charles Nicolas Cochin (1715-90), Secretary of the Académie, who supervised the creation of the copperplates, was very aware of the difference in preferred styles between the Chinese and French, writing that the 'Chinese prefer small, cold, precise hatchings above everything characterizing genius and talent' in France.<sup>24</sup> Cochin was continuously negotiating between 'improving' the prints and keeping to the emperor's command of adherence to the originals.<sup>25</sup> Despite his slight 'Frenchifications', the prints still contain some elements that would have been very unfamiliar to the engravers and French viewers. The use of clear, sharp contours in the far distance, for example, rather than the European haziness of

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<sup>20</sup> Szrajber, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Leverenz, 'Drawings, Proofs and Prints', 43–44.

<sup>22</sup> *Letter from Brother Joseph Castiglione, written in Beijing on July 13, 1765, to the most illustrious President of the Academy of Painting*, quoted in Ma, 'War and Empire: Images of Battle during the Qianlong Reign', 160.

<sup>23</sup> Reed, 'Imperial Impressions: The Qianlong Emperor's Print Suites', 128.

<sup>24</sup> *Report by Cochin for Marigny, dated 9 January 1767*, quoted in Szrajber, 'The "Victories" of the Emperor Qianlong', 39.

<sup>25</sup> Leverenz, 'Drawings, Proofs and Prints', 46.

atmospheric perspective, may explain the Marquis de Marigny's declaration that the prints were "made in Chinese taste".<sup>26</sup>

These prints presented a challenge for French printmakers in other ways. The grand scale of the model drawings meant that the copperplates had to be ordered from England, while the paper was specially manufactured, costing four-hundred livres a ream (Fig. 6).<sup>27</sup> The process of printmaking was extremely labour-intensive and time-consuming, as their level of detail meant that multiple proofs were required.<sup>28</sup> Each drawing was assigned to an experienced engraver who would create an etched state, which Cochin would inspect, adding modelling and details in light and shade with brush and ink on the printed proof (Fig. 7). This image was then returned to the engraver, who either re-etched it or began work with the burin to engrave details (Figs. 8 and 9).<sup>29</sup> The first four copperplates were completed towards the end of 1768, but each had to have two-hundred prints pulled, which, at a rate of only twelve to fifteen prints per day, meant that there was another significant delay before they could be sent back to Canton.<sup>30</sup>

The French enthusiasm for the Qianlong emperor's commission suggests their recognition of the print's ability to be powerful 'active delegates' (in Jennifer Roberts' words) for the French in the Qing court, bolstering trade relations with China.<sup>31</sup> The intimate and sustained study which characterized the Qianlong emperor's viewing habits, suggested through his demands for exactitude and minute detail in the creation of the prints, indicates that they could have advocated for the French through a far more direct, visual communication than may have been possible through human diplomats and language barriers.<sup>32</sup> Towards this aim, and to enhance their display of technical ability, the French discussed many options for embellishing this commission,

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<sup>26</sup> Ma, 'War and Empire: Images of Battle during the Qianlong Reign', 162.

<sup>27</sup> Szrajber, 'The "Victories" of the Emperor Qianlong', 41.

<sup>28</sup> Szrajber, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Leverenz, 'Drawings, Proofs and Prints', 47.

<sup>30</sup> Leverenz, 50.

<sup>31</sup> Jennifer Roberts, 'Introduction: Long-Distance Pictures', in *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Tony Latter, *Emperor Qianlong's Hidden Treasures: Reconsidering the Collection of the Qing Imperial Household* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2019), 114.

including having some of the prints made on silk and in red ink on expensive foreign paper, and an unrealized intention of having the designs also executed on Sèvres vases, or reproducing them as tapestries at the Royal Manufacture of the Gobelins.<sup>33</sup> However, the desire to distinguish France from the rest of Europe in the eyes of the Chinese was not brought to fruition; on the backs of the copperplates returned to China, the imperial artisans inscribed merely ‘engraved in the West’, the specificity of France forgotten.<sup>34</sup> In their attempt to curry favour with the Chinese, the French had effectively become enlisted into the service of the Qianlong emperor, rather as the conquered peoples are shown presenting rolled-up scrolls (possibly prints) to the Emperor in *Receiving the Surrender of the Yili* (Fig. 10)<sup>35</sup>

For the emperor, the decision to have the prints made in France could have been intended to ‘export the vision of imperial might around the world’, as Nicholas Pearce has suggested.<sup>36</sup> However, this propagandist view is somewhat curtailed by the fact that no prints were ever meant to have stayed in France. The Qianlong emperor’s instructions clearly state the need for all the copperplate matrices, each with 200 prints, the model drawings, the emperor’s edict, Castiglione’s letter and the Hong contract, to be returned to Canton in full at the end of the project.<sup>37</sup>

In France, this call for secrecy was largely obeyed. Once the copperplates were completed, Cochin only trusted one printer, Charles Beauvais, to make their impressions, known for his skill and integrity. Printers were notorious for pulling extra impression on the side for personal gain, but it was politically essential that no prints were commercially available, or trade between France and China could be jeopardized.<sup>38</sup> The Compagnie des Indes consequently reported that all proofs were burnt – although, in reality, the amount of extant first states suggest

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<sup>33</sup> Reed, ‘Imperial Impressions: The Qianlong Emperor’s Print Suites’, 126; Szrajber, ‘The “Victories” of the Emperor Qianlong’, 37–38.

<sup>34</sup> Leverenz, ‘Drawings, Proofs and Prints’, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Reed, ‘Imperial Impressions: The Qianlong Emperor’s Print Suites’, 126.

<sup>36</sup> Pearce, ‘Qianlong’s Western Campaign Engravings’, 51.

<sup>37</sup> Szrajber, ‘The “Victories” of the Emperor Qianlong’, 32.

<sup>38</sup> Szrajber, 42.

that quite a few slipped through the gaps.<sup>39</sup> Many of the prints in the book of ‘Chinese Battles’ in the British Museum, for instance, appear to me like incomplete proofs, shown by the lack of Cochin’s name at the bottom centre, which he would only have added after his final approval was given. The original engravings were therefore seen by very few French people, despite the great interest the commission had generated. The few impressions that did remain in France were placed in the Bibliothèque du Roi in 1775 for viewing by the French royal family.<sup>40</sup>

Another reason that it is unlikely that the Qianlong emperor intended this commission to broadcast his military prowess to the French is the fact that the preparatory drawings were conveyed to France with no textual description of their subject matter. The drawings were not transported in sequence, and they did not have the poems composed by the Qianlong emperor to explain their contents.<sup>41</sup> Cochin wrote to two Chinese Christians to attempt to discover the histories these prints depict, but the narrative he received must have been garbled, as the albums that remained in France were bound in the wrong order.<sup>42</sup> The erroneous narrative can be seen in Isidore-Stanislas Helman’s 1785 album of half-sized prints, engraved after the originals (which he would have had access to as the student of Jacques-Philippe Le Bas (1707-83), who engraved *The Storming of Gādān Ola*) (Fig. 11).<sup>43</sup> Helman added ‘explanations’ below each print, but these were often inaccurate, and the ordering of the prints was faulty.<sup>44</sup> It is clear that the Qianlong emperor’s primary concern was the French engravers’ exactitude in reproducing art, rather than France’s accurate understanding of his campaigns.

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<sup>39</sup> Leverenz, ‘Drawings, Proofs and Prints’, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Szrajber, ‘The “Victories” of the Emperor Qianlong’, 44.

<sup>41</sup> Zhou Wei-qiang and National Palace Museum Production Crew, ‘The Victory in the Pacification of Dzungars and Muslims - Introduction by Helman’, *Documenting Victory in Etching* (blog), accessed 10 November 2023, [https://theme.npm.edu.tw/etching/explanation\\_en.html](https://theme.npm.edu.tw/etching/explanation_en.html).

<sup>42</sup> Reed, ‘Imperial Impressions: The Qianlong Emperor’s Print Suites’, 128–29.

<sup>43</sup> Reed, 131.

<sup>44</sup> Leverenz, ‘From Painting to Print, The Battle of Qurman from 1760’, 49–51; Wei-qiang and National Palace Museum Production Crew, ‘The Victory in the Pacification of Dzungars and Muslims - Introduction by Helman’.

The Qianlong emperor was certainly aware of the need for textual descriptions of the events displayed, as when the engravings finally returned to China, woodblock prints of the emperor's celebratory poems explaining the campaigns were attached to them (Fig. 12). For a very small number, the emperor hand-wrote these inscriptions himself, directly onto the sky of the prints, while in others his handwriting was translated onto woodblocks and printed onto the engravings, or on a separate sheet to be bound beside them.<sup>45</sup> This textual description was primarily attached to the prints that were made in China itself, known as 'second states'.<sup>46</sup> Despite France sending a printing press along with the copperplates, many of the missionaries entrusted to instruct the Chinese printers in the use of this new technology had no expertise in printing copperplates, and relied on instruction books.<sup>47</sup> The first Chinese editions of these copperplates was in 1773, using a thin, fibrous brown paper, not as carefully printed as the French impressions, with some showing clumsy retouching in worn areas and wrinkled paper.<sup>48</sup> These prints are rather intriguing, as they combine European-style copperplate printing, including both etching and engraving, with Chinese woodblock printing. By insisting that the copperplates return to be printed in China using Chinese paper and ink, inscribing, or printing on the engravings with Chinese characters, and often cropping out the printed names of the engravings' French producers,<sup>49</sup> the Qianlong emperor effectively appropriated the copperplate print, indelibly impressing his stamp onto this new technology.

As Cheng-hua Wang has explored, the Qing emperors were intent on gaining the abilities in the artistic techniques of glassware, painted enamel, oil painting and copperplate prints, attempting to surpass the Europeans' skill in a form of cultural competition.<sup>50</sup> Therefore the

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<sup>45</sup> Leverenz, 'Drawings, Proofs and Prints', 51.

<sup>46</sup> Reed, 'Imperial Impressions: The Qianlong Emperor's Print Suites', 129.

<sup>47</sup> Szrajber, 'The "Victories" of the Emperor Qianlong', 39, 44.

<sup>48</sup> Leverenz, 'Drawings, Proofs and Prints', 51.

<sup>49</sup> Tokio, 'Qianlong Emperor's Copperplate Engravings of the "Conquest of Western Regions"', 10.

<sup>50</sup> Cheng-Hua Wang, 'A Global Perspective on Eighteenth-Century Chinese Art and Visual Culture', *The Art Bulletin* 96, no. 4 (2 October 2014): 381; Cheng-hua Wang and Rui Oliveira Lopes, 'Prints in Sino-European Artistic Interactions of the Early Modern Period', in *Face to Face: The Transcendence of the Arts in China and Beyond - Historical Perspectives* (Lisbon: Centro de Investigacao e Estudos em Belas-Artes, Universidade de Lisboa, 2014), 434–35.

emperor Qianlong's decision to have these *Conquest* plates printed in China as well as France, I argue, was part of this drive for technological and artistic ascendancy. On the emperor's orders, both the Parisian prints and their original drawings were to be stored at the Palace of Beginning Auspiciousness, adjacent to where the palace craftsmen and artisans resided and worked, so that they would have easy access to them to consult as models and inspiration.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, Susan Dackerman's insistence that prints served as 'active agents in the creation and dissemination of knowledge' can be seen to materially play out.<sup>52</sup> The Chinese artisans learned from the printing of these engravings the secrets of the copperplate print, resulting in the creation of six more copperplate print series documenting the emperor's later campaigns, engraved and printed by Chinese imperial printmakers on monumental copperplates of a similar scale.<sup>53</sup> In line with Qing pictorial traditions, these later prints foreground the landscape, with water, trees, mountains and ridges depicted through repetitious strokes outlining forms, with undulating lines across the sky suggesting rolling clouds and cross-hatching creating limited shadows (Fig. 13). They focused on the curving lines of the burin, creating decorative patterns across the sheet, calligraphic and sinuous.<sup>54</sup> The woodblock texts of the emperor's poems were affixed to the top of the plates, enforcing the message of the Qing conquest and assimilation of the copperplate print, and consequently China's symbolic ascendancy over Europe.

Despite the Qianlong emperor's interest in copperplates, this technology remained on the fringes of Chinese art.<sup>55</sup> This may have been because of the emperor's strict control of their circulation, limiting the number of prints produced and only distributing them to favoured

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<sup>51</sup> Latter, *Emperor Qianlong's Hidden Treasures*, 99.

<sup>52</sup> Susan Dackerman, 'Introduction', in *Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Susan Dackerman (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Art Museums, 2011), 4.

<sup>53</sup> Reed, 'Imperial Impressions: The Qianlong Emperor's Print Suites', 133–34.

<sup>54</sup> Reed, 135–36.

<sup>55</sup> Antony Griffiths, *The Print Before Photography: An Introduction to European Printmaking 1550-1820* (London: The British Museum, 2016), 305.

individuals.<sup>56</sup> He retained the majority in his private imperial collection, through which he emblematically exercised authority, indicating the prints' value as symbols of his reign.<sup>57</sup>

The prints' significance resided in the multiple forms of viewing they facilitated, as well as the intimations of power their production imbued them with. They offered a privileged viewpoint of the emperor's campaigns, both in terms of the practical, panoramic scenes depicted, and through the more intellectual perspective of evidentiary scholarship, via which the Qianlong emperor could see his empire's position within history and contemporary global politics.<sup>58</sup> The prints thereby became 'evidence' of the greatness of the Qianlong Emperor, both in his conquests of East Turkestan and his diplomatic reach and influence within Europe. Simultaneously, as Jonathan Hay has suggested, having the prints designed and engraved by European artists may have been a form of self-displacement, through which the emperor could gain a new perspective by viewing his own culture from without.<sup>59</sup> These multiple avenues for perceiving and utilizing the prints, however, were a privilege, not to be shared with the vast multiethnic Chinese populace or with foreign nations such as France.

Many of the prints only returned to Europe through military aggression, in wake of the Second Opium War of 1856-60, and the Boxer Rebellion of 1900-1901.<sup>60</sup> Employing Igor Kopytoff's framework of the singularization or commodification of material culture as evidence of the object's cultural biography, this geographical shift can also be seen as a larger change in the prints' biographies.<sup>61</sup> From being part of the 'symbolic inventory' of Chinese society, singularized by their limited number, elite gifting and exclusion from the commercial market, their transportation to Europe transformed them into commodities, bought and sold in auction houses

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<sup>56</sup> Leverenz, 'Drawings, Proofs and Prints', 51.

<sup>57</sup> For discussions of the Qianlong emperor's collections and their meanings, see Latter, *Emperor Qianlong's Hidden Treasures*, 109, 115, 118; Reed, 'Imperial Impressions: The Qianlong Emperor's Print Suites', 125.

<sup>58</sup> Latter, *Emperor Qianlong's Hidden Treasures*, 119-30.

<sup>59</sup> Hay, 'Foreword', x.

<sup>60</sup> Leverenz, 'Drawings, Proofs and Prints', 52.

<sup>61</sup> Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: University Press, 1986), 72-83.

across the globe.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, many prints are now being transported back to China by private collectors, in a repetition of their movement more than two centuries ago.

In conclusion, the object biographies of the *East Turkestan Campaign* prints offer insights into the Qianlong emperor's use of international artistic networks to promote his power within the Qing empire. The *Campaign* copperplates' importance as political tools for the emperor can be seen through his insistence on their hybridity of European and Chinese styles (in their inspiration and creation) and printing techniques (in their combination with woodblocks and Chinese printing materials), in line with the Qing dynasty's policy of expanding influence through multiethnic socialisation. Despite their creation in France, their secrecy and the inaccuracies of the French explanations of their subject matter indicates that the prints were intended entirely for a Chinese elite audience, presumably due to the unique and privileged perspectives they offer of the Qianlong emperor's campaign and wider rule. Contrary to French hopes of the prints acting as delegates to promote trade, the Chinese demand for such European technology was actually lessened as the Qing emperor's artisans learned from them the secrets of copperplate engraving, co-opting this wonder-inducing foreign technology as a manifestation of China's global reach and power.

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<sup>62</sup> Kopytoff, 73.

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## List of Illustrations

- Figure 1.** Engraved by Charles Simonneau after painting by Adam François van der Meulen, *The French armies cross the Rhine at Lobith on June 12<sup>th</sup> 1672*, from the series *The Conquests and Battles of Louis XIV*, c. 1685, etching and engraving on paper, 52 x 96 cm, British Museum, London (Photo: British Museum)
- Figure 2.** Giuseppe Castiglione, engraved by Jacques Philippe Le Bas, printed by Charles Nicolas Cochin, *The Storming of the Camp at Gädän Ola*, plate 2 of the *East Turkestan Campaign Series*, 1769, etching and engraving on paper, 57 x 92 cm, British Museum, London (Photo: British Museum)
- Figure 3.** Detail of *Taizu Defeating the Ula Army* from *The Pictorial Veritable Records of Taizu*, scroll 3. Fu Ssu-nien Library, Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taipei (Photo: Fu Ssu-nien Library)
- Figure 4.** Giuseppe Castiglione, *Fragment of 'The Great Victory at Qurman'* from the *East Turkestan Campaign* paintings, 1760-61, 68.5 x 105.5 cm, colour-on-silk, Sotheby's, London (Photo: Sotheby's)
- Figure 5.** After drawing by Giovanni Damasceno Salusti, engraved by Augustin de Saint-Aubin, printed by Charles Nicolas Cochin, detail of *The Great Victory of Qurman*, plate 8 of the *East Turkestan Campaign*, 1770, etching and engraving on paper, 56 x 93 cm, British Museum, London (Photo: the author)
- Figure 6.** Photo with fingers for scale of *The Storming of the Camp at Gädän Ola*, plate 2 of the *East Turkestan Campaign Series*, drawn by Giuseppe Castiglione, engraved by Jacques Philippe Le Bas, printed by Charles Nicolas Cochin, 1769, etching and engraving on paper, 57 x 92 cm, British Museum, London (Photo: the author)
- Figure 7.** Etched by Jacques Philippe Le Bas, or possibly Moreau le Jeune, after Giuseppe Castiglione, *First State of The Camp at Gädän Ola is Raided*, c. 1765, pure etching on paper, 57.1 x 92.6 cm (sheet) and 51.3 x 89.3 cm (print), Musée du Louvre, Department of Graphic Arts (Photo: Musée du Louvre)
- Figure 8.** Detail of Figure 6, showing first etched state.
- Figure 9.** Detail of Figure 2, showing first etched state.
- Figure 10.** Detail of *Receiving the Surrender of the Yili*, plate 1 of the *East Turkestan Campaign*, etched by B. L. Prevot after drawing by Ignatius Sichelbart, 1769, etching and engraving on paper, 56.8 x 92.8 cm, British Museum (Photo: the author)
- Figure 11.** Isidore Stanislas Helman, after Giuseppe Castiglione, *Tsereng et Yu-Pao ayant eu peu d'union entre-eux, et leur successeur, Taltanga s'étant laissé trompé par les Hasacks... (Tsereng and Yu-Pao having had little union between them, and their successor, Taltanga having allowed himself to be deceived by the Hasacks...)*, from edition entitled *Les conquêtes de l'empereur de la Chine*, published by Helman, 1784, etching and engraving on paper, 26.8 x 42.9 cm, Royal Collection Trust (Photo: Royal Collection Trust).
- Figure 12.** Designed by Giuseppe Castiglione, engraved by Jacques Philippe Le Bas, printed by Charles Nicolas Cochin, *The Storming of the Camp at Gädän Ola*, plate 2 of the *East Turkestan Campaign Series*, 1769, etching and engraving on paper, 57 x 92 cm, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland (Photo: Cleveland Museum of Art)
- Figure 13.** Unknown engraver after drawings by Jia Quan and Li Ming, *Sheng qin Zhuang Datian (Capturing Alive Zhuang Datian)*, from *Ping ding Taiwan zhan tu* (a suite of 16 engravings of the Qianlong emperor's campaigns in Taiwan), Beijing, 1789-90, copperprint engraving on xuan paper, 51 x 87 cm, Harvard University, Houghton Library (Photo: Harvard University)

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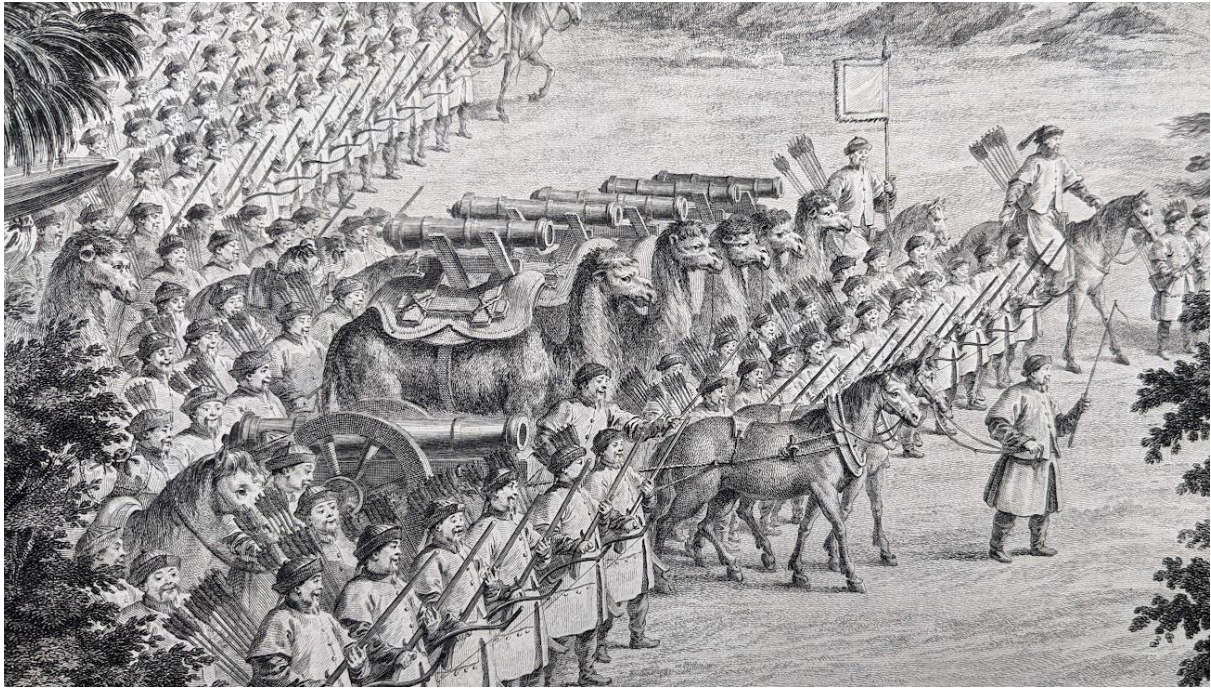
**Figure 2.** Giuseppe Castiglione, engraved by Jacques Philippe Le Bas, printed by Charles Nicolas Cochin, *The Storming of the Camp at Gädän Ola*, plate 2 of the *East Turkestan Campaign Series*, 1769, etching and engraving on paper, 57 x 92 cm, British Museum, London.



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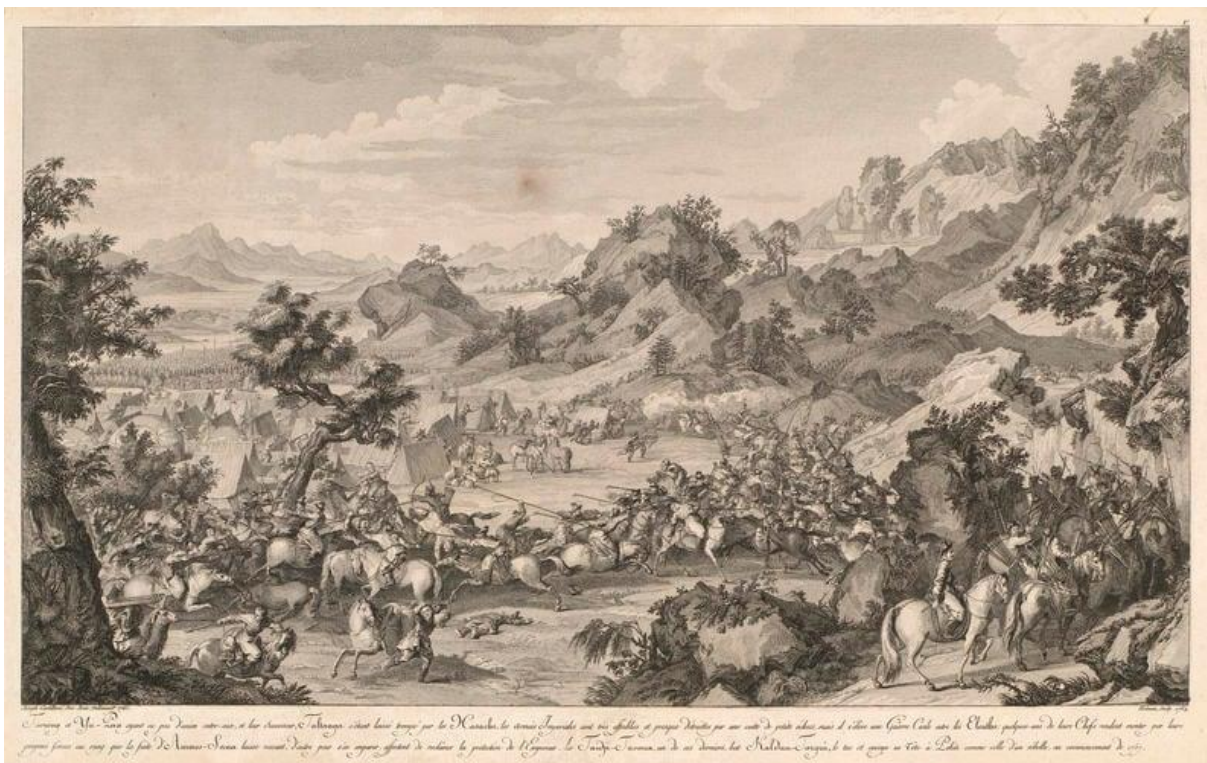
**Figure 8.** Detail of Figure 6, showing first etched state.



**Figure 9.** Detail of Figure 2, showing finished etched and engraved state.



**Figure 10.** Detail of *Receiving the Surrender of the Yili*, plate 1 of the *East Turkestan Campaign*, showing the Yili holding out the tributes to the general, including scrolls possibly containing prints on the right-hand side, etched by B. L. Prevot after drawing by Ignatius Sichelbart, 1769, etching and engraving on paper, 56.8 x 92.8 cm, British Museum.



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